THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF SRI AUROBINDO

V. P. VARMA

In the early part of this century a young Indian gave up his professorial chair in Baroda and made a dramatic entry into Indian politics, gathering around him a band of youthful enthusiasts and soon became the patron-saint of the revolutionary movement of the day. He was tried as the chief accused in the first case of conspiracy against the British Government, and jailed. On his release he equally dramatically abandoned politics and turned to religion. Sri Aurobindo is well-known in India and abroad as the rebel politician turned mystic. He retired to Pondicherry and spent the rest of his long life in study, contemplation and writing. To this day controversy surrounds him and questions such as, was he a mere political adventurer, or was he a genuine mystic who had momentarily blundered into politics, are asked.

Professor Varma's book seeks to establish the Sage of Pondicherry as an outstanding political philosopher who attempted to synthesize Eastern and Western trends. Romain Rolland called Sri Aurobindo "the highest synthesis of the genius of Europe and the genius of Asia". For this reason the study is elaborately comparative and hardly neglects any shade of thought among Western philosophers which might be related to Sri Aurobindo's either by affinity or opposition. Another feature of this work is the presentation of Sri Aurobindo's political thought (widely scattered in his writings) as a whole and as a consistent part of his world-view or his general philosophy. Dr. Varma's premise is that although "a spiritual metaphysician", Sri Aurobindo "was not isolated from the world and its problems." He is the sage who speaks of divine life, "formulates the ideal of the realization of a . . . supramental consciousness" and concludes "that the solution of present civilizational and evolutionary crises requires the growth of unity, harmony and freedom."

Rs. 18.50

२६ मार्च १९६२, सोमवार

THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF SRI AUROBINDO

By the same author :

Irrationalism : Philosophical and Sociological

The Political Philosophy of Hegel and Marx

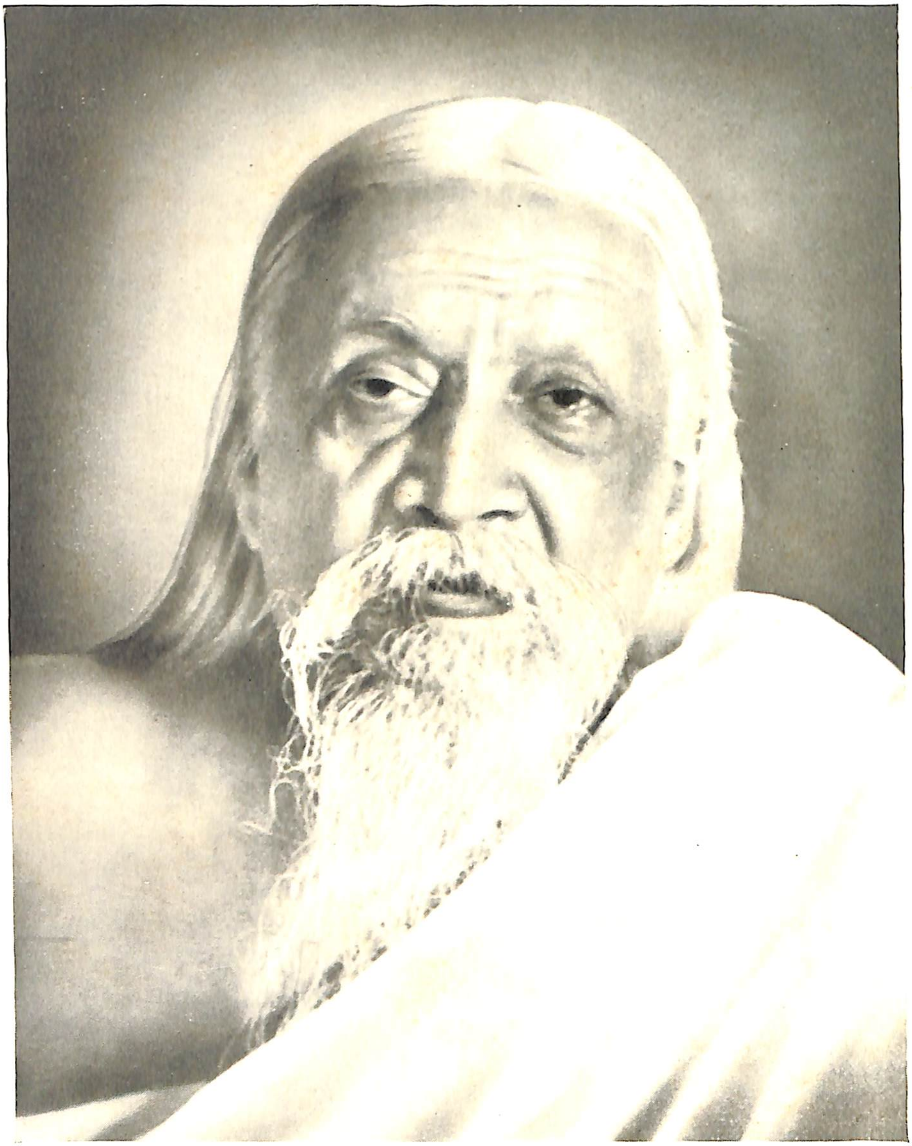
Hindu Political Thought and Its Metaphysical Foundations

Rajniti Aur Darshana (In Hindi)

Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi and Sarvodaya

Modern Indian Political Thought

Rajnitika Lekhamala (In Hindi)



Courtesy : Aurobindo Ashrama, Pondicherry

SRI AUROBINDO

THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF SRI AUROBINDO

BY

DR. VISHWANATH PRASAD VARMA
M.A. (Patna), M.A. (Columbia), PH.D. (Chicago)

ASIA PUBLISHING HOUSE
BOMBAY CALCUTTA NEW DELHI
MADRAS LONDON NEW YORK

Vishwanath Prasad Varma (1924)

PRINTED IN INDIA

BY S. C. GHOSE AT THE CALCUTTA PRESS PRIVATE LIMITED, 1 WELLINGTON SQUARE, CALCUTTA 13 AND PUBLISHED BY P. S. JAYASINGHE, ASIA PUBLISHING HOUSE, BOMBAY.

This Book

is most reverently dedicated to my grandfather

Shri Thakur Prasad (1867-1920)

his elder brother

Shri Beni Prasad (1856-1914)

and his cousin

Shri Satya Narayan Prasad (1900-1941)

PREFACE

The great importance of Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) in the realms of philosophy, Yoga, psychology and literature is being recognized both by Eastern and Western critics and students. The historian of Indian nationalism and the freedom movement would accord him an honourable place in the great company of Dadabhai Naoroji, Pherozeshah Mehta, Tilak, Pal, Gokhale, Surendranath Banerjee, Lala Lajpat Rai, Shraddhananda and other great leaders of the early years of the struggle for independence. But besides being a leader of men and political action, a poet-metaphysician and a sage, Aurobindo also has a place as a political thinker and social philosopher. Not only do we find sociological analyses in the *Essays on the Gita* and *The Life Divine*, but *The Human Cycle* and *The Ideal of Human Unity* are works of mature social and political enquiry and investigation on an advanced theoretical plane. This book is an attempt to reconstruct and critically evaluate the political ideas of Aurobindo on the basis of comparative methodology.

Maharsi Aurobindo has been one of the most creative and significant figures in the Indian renaissance movement. He was gifted with surprising powers of intellect. He was a great sage, Yogi and philosophical thinker. Romain Rolland regarded him as the highest synthesis of the genius of Europe and the genius of Asia. Rabindranath Tagore hailed him as the most pronounced exponent of the spiritual message of India to the world. Radhakrishnan thought of him as perhaps the most accomplished of modern Indian thinkers and in a statement to the press after Aurobindo's death declared him to be the greatest intellectual of our age.

Sri Aurobindo showed signs of genius and acquired great learning while he was a student in England for fourteen years, from the age of seven to the age of twenty-one. His poetic powers achieved fruition when he was working as a professor of English at Baroda. He renounced all wordly prospects and devoted himself to the service of India at the time of the partition of Bengal. He began to be revered as the messiah of a new, inspired and fervent nationalism. He preached the sanctification of patriotism as the dedicated worship of India personified

as the Great Mother. He was one of the acknowledged leaders of the new Extremist Party of nationalists. Lokamanya Tilak, Aurobindo Ghosh and Bipin Chandra Pal were the champions of an assertive nationalism. Sri Aurobindo will be remembered as the prophet of a pure religion of nationalism. His heroic and saintly figure will continue to occupy an honoured place in the annals of Indian nationalism. He had the moral courage to champion the creed of absolute Swaraj for India as early as 1907.

Aurobindo has been a great *Bhasyakara.* He has given a new spiritual meaning to some of the Mantras of the Rigveda. He has sponsored the new esoteric and mystic canon of Vedic interpretation. His *Hymns to the Mystic Fire* and *On the Veda* are attempts to furnish a new light in the field of Vedic exegesis. His commentaries on *the Isha* and *the Kena Upanishads* are very powerful and deep. The *Essay on the Gita* is a very important book in the realm of the studies of that great philosophical poem. Aurobindo has a permanent place in the field of writing luminous commentaries on the ancient scriptures of our country.

Aurobindo was also a great creative literary figure. He had a fine faculty of poetic perception. He was a literary critic of importance. He has written some wonderfully inspiring and lively poems. His greatest claim to literary fame is his *Savitri.* He spent over twenty-five years in the preparation of this monumental work. It may prove to be an epoch-making book revealing the divine potentialities of the human spirit. It has attempted to lift the veil of pessimism and despair from the heart and mind of modern intellectuals and is a dramatic presentation of the spiritual pilgrimage and perfection of the human soul.

Maharsi Aurobindo was a great philosophical genius. *The Life Divine* has been hailed as one of the greatest works of the twentieth century. If *Savitri* reminds me of Dante's *Divine Comedy, The Life Divine* represents a theological-metaphysical synthesis of the type of Plato's *Republic,* St. Augustine's *The City of God,* St. Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* or Samkara's famous commentary on the *Brahman-Sutras.* When I read *The Life Divine* I am often reminded of Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript,* Berdyaev's *Slavery and Freedom*

and Bosanquet's *The Principle of Individuality and Value* and *The Value and Destiny of the Individual.* What gives to Aurobindo great eminence as a writer and thinker is his power of combining vigour and force of thought with a majestic style.

It is true that the modern world is coming to recognize more and more the significance of Aurobindo as a literary and metaphysical giant. But he is also a social and political philosopher. He was one of the foremost leaders of the Extremist Party in Bengal during 1905-1910. The editorial articles that he wrote in those days in the *Bande Mataram,* the *Karmayogin* and the *Dharma* are full of political inspiration. The *Speeches* have the same moving power as Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation.* Like Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo also taught the theory of passive resistance, although he was not a votary of the absolutism of Ahimsa. Aurobindo's political writings are significant not only because he was a great leader but also because they are imbued with the spirit of exalted patriotic fervour. They had the power of inspiring followers and leaders during the struggle for independence. Subhas Chandra Bose was deeply influenced by the example and the writings of Sri Aurobindo. At the time of our present national reconstruction Aurobindo's emphasis on moral purification for political action is significant.

Sri Aurobindo has written two important books in the field of political philosophy. His *Ideal of Human Unity* is reminiscent of Dante's *De Monarchia* and Kant's *Perpetual Peace.* On the basis of a great knowledge of European and Indian history and in the framework of spiritual metaphysics Aurobindo has taught the gospel of one world and the inner oneness of man. His *Human Cycle* is another significant book in the field of political philosophy. Aurobindo enunciates a psychological and metaphysical approach to the study of the evolution of human civilization and culture. His *Foundations of Indian Culture* contains some mature reflections on the social and political evolution of India and it can be viewed as a work on the philosophy of India's history. These three books are enough to establish the claim of Sri Aurobindo as a political philosopher. There are ideas of social and political relevance in some of his other works too. His *Evolution, Superman* and *Ideals and Progress* may also safely be taken as books on political philosophy particularly if

we bear in mind that they are meant to counterbalance the tremendous influence of Darwinian ideas of evolution and the Nietzschean concept of superman on political thought and practice. Hence, although these three small books of Aurobindo do not technically deal with the concepts and institutions of politics, they do have significant political and sociological relevance.

Although Aurobindo is hailed as a sage, mystic and spiritual metaphysician he was not isolated from the world and its problems. Even his books on abstruse metaphysics contain a sociological orientation. He does not discuss merely the problems of subliminal psychology and transcendental metaphysics. He is also seriously concerned with the problems of a spiritualized society and the gnostic community. He is comparable to Plato to the extent that both of them, while immensely concerned with the acquisition of the knowledge of supreme truth and reality, refuse to be satisfied with mere individual enlightenment. Plato and Aurobindo plead for a descent of the higher powers for the transformation of the world and the regeneration of humanity. To the extent that Aurobindo conceives of a society of enlightened souls, his statements and conclusions do come to have a sociological significance. Hence I think that the last two chapters of *The Life Divine* are also remarkable exercises in the field of idealistic and utopian social and political thought. To the extent that mysticism has a metaphysical and a transcendental note it does not belong to the realm of the social and political sciences. But even as an example of metaphysical and mystical construction Aurobindo's philosophy has significant political implications. Although he formulates the ideal of the realization of a gnostic supramental consciousness, he discusses such sociological problems as the organization of the gnostic community and the relation of the members of the spiritualized society and the gnostic community with the members of the normal human society. Furthermore, he postulates that the solution of the present civilizational and evolutionary crisis requires the growth of unity, harmony and freedom. He pleads for spontaneous mutuality and reciprocity. Although these goals require for their realization an inner transfiguration, yet, since they are to

be practised on a social scale (because a number of people will practise them), and because even if based on an internal psychological and spiritual change they are supposed to generate social influences and impacts, their analysis becomes relevant for a political scientist. Whenever a group begins to do a thing it does become a matter of sociological and political relevance. Aurobindo's mysticism is not derived from the rejection of the terrestrial basis of life but implies an integral fulfilment and perfection of earthly existence and therefore it does demand a sociological study also. In the Western sociology of religion we find this type of study and research in the writings of Max Weber, Emil Durkheim and Ernst Troeltsch.

I have been a student of Aurobindo's works since 1942. *The Ideal of the Karmayogin* strongly and powerfully influenced me. Its impressive and inspired language and its dominating spiritualism and patriotic fervour cast an indelible impression on my youthful mind when I read and re-read this work as a post-graduate student. In 1942 I began to study *The Life Divine* during the famous nationalist days of the "Quit India" movement. In October 1944 I began an intensive study of Aurobindo's philosophy. In that year I read the *Essays on the Gita*. In 1945 I proposed to go to Pondichery. At that time I was working as a lecturer in History in the H.D.J. College, Arrah (Bihar). On 24 April 1945, I saw Aurobindo and was inspired to see his magnetic figure full of lustre. He appeared as a venerable seer and patriarch of the old days. There was a deep golden hue on his face. During the years 1945 to 1947 I further studied Aurobindo's books. I made a thorough study of *Heraclitus* and *The Life Divine*. From May 1947 to June 1948 I was studying at the Columbia University in the City of New York and writing a thesis *The Critique of Marxism*. At that time I studied Hegel's *The Philosophy of History*. Then I discovered certain strong points of resemblance between the political thought of Aurobindo and German idealism. Further reflections on the philosophy of history confirmed my intuitions. I delivered a lecture at the Second Pan-American Congress of Philosophy in New York in January 1949 and I stressed in that speech the creative advance in philosophy represented by Aurobindo's *The Life Divine*.

In 1950 I returned from the United States. In the United States, under the inspiration of German professors, I had become immensely interested in the philosophical and sociological foundations of political ideas. I planned this work, *The Political Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo* in January 1952 and the first draft was ready on 1 September 1952. Since then I had the opportunity of delivering several lectures on the philosophy and politics of Aurobindo. In December 1955 I read two papers on the political thought of Aurobindo at the Bhopal Conference of the All-India Political Science Association. In February 1957 I delivered a series of Extension Lectures on Modern Indian Thought at the S.C.S. College, Puri. The second lecture in this series was on Aurobindo's political thought. In the academic sessions of 1953-1955 I also conducted a group seminar in Aurobindo's *The Isha Upanishad* and *The Life Divine.* I had to deliver about thirty lectures in these seminars. There were also fruitful discussions. During these years I had the occasion to think over several problems connected with Aurobindo's thought, and the original draft written in 1952 has been very thoroughly revised in the light of the experience of these various types of intellectual activities in which I have been engaged.

In this study I have followed the comparative method. The political philosophy of Aurobindo has been analysed not only with constant reference to the thought of Dayananda, Vivekananda, Tilak, Pal, Gandhi and Tagore but also with reference to the idealistic school of Western political thought represented by Plato, Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Green, Bradley, Bosanquet and others. Aurobindo both in his own intellectual development and his writings represents a synthesis of some of the most powerful and significant trends in Eastern and Western thought and hence we feel that the comparative method of analysis is relevant to this enquiry into his political philosophy. But sometimes the use of the comparative method involves mere superficial comparisons and, therefore, in order to avoid this defect the subtle philosophical differences between these various writers have also been analysed.

In this book an attempt has been made also to analyse the roots of Aurobindo's thought. Aurobindo is a synthetic thinker of gigantic dimensions but all great thinkers draw sour-

ces of sustentation from the writings of the past. In this critical and historical study I have tried to trace the fundamental and vital currents in the thought of the East and the West which have provided the materials for Aurobindo's philosophizing. Aurobindo was a very great scholar and he had spent several years as a college professor. He had a profound knowledge of Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, English and French languages and literature. His mind was fertilized by the writings of the greatest teachers, philosophers, poets and thinkers of the world. I have tried wherever possible to trace the sources of Aurobindo's thought because this work is planned as a research dissertation in the field of comparative political thought. I presume this synthetic comparative study of the roots of political thought would have appealed to Aurobindo himself because he was one of the greatest advocates of integralism and reconciliation. Possibly such reconstruction of the political philosophy of Aurobindo might not appeal to some sections in our country who would regard it as an enterprise in the profanization of a sacred personality. But we must not forget that Aurobindo was always keenly conscious of the sociological implications of his teachings.

This sociological investigation and political enquiry is based not only upon the writings of Aurobindo directly pertaining to these branches of study, but also involves a considerable amount of reconstruction. The first chapter of this book discussing Aurobindo's philosophy of history is mainly my reconstruction of the scattered thought of Aurobindo on the problems of historical causation. On the basis of the reconstructed materials I have attempted some generalization and evaluation. Occasionally I have added additional points from comparative philosophy and sociology to elucidate Aurobindo's propositions. Sometimes I have incorporated further historical details and examples. My studies in the field of Western philosophy of history especially of Hegel, Marx, Spengler, Toynbee and Berdyaev suggested to me the idea of this reconstruction of Aurobindo's philosophy of history.

This study which I have attempted seeks to trace the dominant metaphysical assumptions and foundations of Aurobindo's political and social ideas. Aurobindo's conception of

history as the fulfilment of God or his theory of the God-sent leader or his conception of the presence of a subjectivistic element in the Irish and Indian national movements would lose most of its meaning if it is not studied in the light of his theory of spiritual determinism. Hence an attempt has been made in this book to trace the metaphysical foundations of some of the pertinent political statements of Aurobindo. I have made, in the fifth chapter, a sociological attempt to study the implications for society and politics of Aurobindo's philosophical ideas regarding the gnostic existence, the spiritual evolution of man and the divine life. This method we find elaborately employed in the history of European political philosophy, especially with regard to St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Kant and Hegel and even Plato and Aristotle, where not only the theological, metaphysical and political writings of these authors have been taken into consideration but also the political influences and implications of their metaphysical writings have been discussed and debated. It is essential to study the social implications of the metaphysical thought of a writer. It is fantastic to rest content with positing a separation between the metaphysical structure and the social and political thought of an author. Hence I have tried to study the political and sociological bearings of some of Aurobindo's philosophical concepts, for example, his critique of Mayavada. The second, the third and the fourth chapters of the book are based on the political and sociological writings of Aurobindo supplemented by references to his metaphysical treatises. Thus the work of the study of the foundations of political thought which I have attempted is both philosophical and sociological.

It is the firm belief of the writer that we need a new political philosophy. A mere reiteration of Western thought-patterns and ideas would not suffice. Mere revivalism of Asiatic thought is a reactionary intellectual enterprise. Hence what is needed is a comprehensive reconstruction and re-building. We have not only to be thoroughly conversant with Western political thought from Plato to Lenin and Indian political thought from the Rigveda and Kautilya to Gandhi and Aurobindo, but these theoretical formulas have to be empirically tested with reference to the data provided by world history,

sociology and anthropology. We are living at a time when an international awareness of the abiding traditions and values of mankind everywhere is increasing. It is possible that new light might be thrown on the emerging political problems of today on the basis of this rich mass of accumulated cultural heritage.

During the last sixteen years I have been discussing the philosophy and political thought of Sri Aurobindo with several scholars, colleagues, friends and students. With Pandit Ayodhya Prasad, the great Arya Samajist scholar of Calcutta, and Pandit Brahmananda, I discussed the significance of Aurobindo's Vedic and Upanishadic commentaries. I have had conversations and discussions on the thought of Aurobindo with Prof. Kailash Behari Sahay, an old friend of college days, Sri Sukdeo Prasad Varma of Motihari, Acharya Dhirendra Mohan Datta, Dr. Rajendra Prasad of Patna University, Principal B. N. Madhav and Professor M. P. Agrawal. Justice B. N. Roy has helped in the preparation of this work. My wife, Professor Premila Varma, has been of immense help in the preparation of the final form of this book. My friend, Professor Sri Krishna Prasad, placed all his books and journals relating to Aurobindo at my disposal. My younger brother, Sri Vaidyanath Prasad Varma, has been a source of great encouragement. Sri Mahamaya Prasad of the Patna University Press devoted a great deal of time to typing this thesis. I am deeply grateful to all of them for their help and encouragement.

Patna VISHWANATH PRASAD VARMA
11 March, 1958

CONTENTS

ii

CHAPTER FOUR

SOME FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS OF SRI AUROBINDO'S POLITICAL THOUGHT

CHAPTER FIVE

IDEALISTIC AND UTOPIAN ELEMENTS IN SRI AUROBINDO'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF SRI AUROBINDO

CHAPTER ONE

SRI AUROBINDO'S PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

1. MEANING OF PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

The philosophy of history comprehends three distinct types of intellectual orientations and enterprises.[1] First, it indicates the isolation and significant analysis of the fundamental causal motivation of historical events. St. Augustine, Hegel and Marx are philosophers of history in this sense.[2] They want to find out the source of the impulsion of historical movements. They may emphasize either God or the absolute idea or the forces of production according to their broad metaphysical and sociological assumptions but the type of work they are doing pertains to the field of historical and cultural causation. Secondly, philosophy of history connotes the delimitation and the distinct specification of various culture-types and cycles. Such work in the social sciences has been inspired by the success of Darwinian biological morphology. Biology points out the gradual formation of distinct structural types and patterns in the evolution of the various species and similarly philosophers of history analyze the structure of human history. The works of Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee belong to this category.[3] Although both Spengler and Toynbee refer to historical causation, their primary concern is with the categorization and specification of the cultural and civilizational cycles. Thirdly, the phrase "philosophy of history" is used in an epistemological

[1] V.P. Varma, "Introduction to a New Philosophy of History", *The Visvabharati Quarterly*, Autumn 1956.

[2] G.W.F. Hegel, in *Philosophy of History* (English translation by J. Silere), distinguishes between the (*i*) original, (*ii*) reflective and (*iii*) philosophical approaches to history. For Marx, *Capital*, vol. I (Chicago, 1906), pp. 14-5, p. 241. Also the Introduction of *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Chicago, 1904).

[3] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West* (English translation by C.F. Atkinson, New York, 1927-1928), vol. I, p. 49, says: "The philosophy of this book I owe to the philosophy of Goethe . . . and also to that of Nietzsche." Also refer to Spengler's famous distinction between historical physiognomic and naturalistic systematic. For a general critique of Spengler, V.P. Varma, *Irrationalism: Philosophical and Sociological* (Banaras, 1951), may be consulted. Spengler states his general problem thus: "In this book is attempted for the first time the venture of predetermining history." A. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, one volume edition (Oxford, 1947), pp. 1-59.

sense.[1] It refers to the problem of historical knowledge. In this sense, the neo-Kantian axiology of Windelband and Rickert has formulated a distinction between the natural and the socio-cultural sciences. According to them, science is concerned with the universal and history with the particular. As Rickert says: "Empirical reality becomes nature when we regard it with reference to the general (*das Allgemeine*), it becomes history when we regard it with reference to the particular and individual (*das Besondere und Individuelle*)."[2] Dilthey referred to the distinction between the natural sciences and the cultural sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*). As a student of Heinrich Rickert, Max Weber began the serious study of the epistemological and methodological problems of the social sciences and sponsored the movement for a value-free, objective sociology. Aurobindo is a philosopher of history in the first sense. His problem is the analysis of the factors that contribute to the rise and fall of cultures and he has investigated this problem with special reference to the histories of India and Europe. He is not interested in the epistemology of politics and history.

The word history is used in two senses. First, it means the social or cultural or political history of a nation or a country. This is the general sense of the word history or *Geschichte*.[3] The primary emphasis in this case is on events and in Aurobindo we find the word referred to in this sense. Secondly, history is identified with time or historicity or movement. In this sense wherever we get the acceptance of the realistic conception of time we find an element of history.[4] Thus we see that contrasted to Schelling, Hegel introduces a dynamic content in his view of the absolute. The metaphysics of Aurobindo is also historical in the sense that it considers that the absolute manifests

[1] See the analysis of Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (London, 1946); M. Mandelbaum, *The Problem of Historical Knowledge* (New York, 1938).

[2] Heinrich Rickert, *Die Grenzen der Naturwissenschaftliche Begriffsbildung* (Tübingen, 1929), p. 227.

[3] Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, p. 60, says: "In our language the term *History* (*Geschichte*) unites the objective with the subjective side, . . . it comprehends no less what has happened than the narration of what has happened." For Benedetto Croce's distinction between history and chronicles, see Croce, *History, Its Theory and Practice* (English translation by Ainslie, New York 1923), p. 27.

[4] For the exposition of the meaning of history, see F. J. Teggart, *The Theory of History*; Woodbridge, *The Purpose of History*; N. Berdyaev, *The Meaning of History*; and Flint, *Philosophy of History in France and Germany*.

itself in the world for its fulfilment and is not a purely immutable motionless static being.

We find serious speculations in Europe about historical causation since the middle of the eighteenth century. Although Voltaire was the first to use the phrase "philosophy of history", the German humanist Herder wrote, for the first time, two systematic books on the subject. We can distinguish three broad intellectual forces that have contributed to this movement towards a philosophy of history. First, the rise of the dialectical methodology of Hegel and Marx. Distinguished from a speculative idealism, the dialectic emphasized the ideas of motion, change, progression, catastrophic advance and even sudden retrogression. The post-Hegelian conservatives, historians and the Marxists wrote voluminous books on the subject of historical causation and thus furthered the movement towards generalized reflections on the course of human history. Secondly, the movement towards an objective historiography began in nineteenth century Germany. Leopold V. Ranke, Eichhorn and Niebuhr were the leaders of this movement.[1] Historiography is primarily empirical in character and because of its concern with problems like the collection of data, periodization, documentation, objective presentation of facts, etc., it helps the cause of philosophy of history. In the nineteenth century an evolutionary view of history was empirically strengthened by the plethoric collection of sociological, anthropological, ethnographic and other materials bearing upon the social and political evolution of mankind. In Germany there was the development of a historical school of jurisprudence and economics. Thirdly, the rise and phenomenal success of Darwinian biology cast almost a hypnotic spell on the social sciences and the concept of evolution was extended to almost all the social disciplines.[2] Darwinism not only attacked Christian anthropology but inspired the formulation of an evolutionary conceptual framework in the historical and social sciences. In the formulation of his cyclical philosophy of history, Aurobindo, as will be later pointed out, has been influenced by Karl Lamprecht who wrote

[1] Albion W. Small, *Origins of Sociology*; the earlier chapters are relevant in this connexion.

[2] John Dewey, *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy*; Hugh Miller, *History and Science.*

his historical works in the latter part of the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth centuries and constructed a historical methodology opposed to that of Ranke. Aurobindo in spite of his hostility to the social and economic implications of Darwinism has also accepted the general formula of an evolutionary progression.

Generally, people begin reflections upon historical motivation, cultural causality and human destiny when either in the national or personal life they are faced with some imminent serious crises and catastrophes.[1] St. Augustine was shocked at the imminent fall of the Roman Empire and he wrote *The Divine City*. Spengler began the examination of the foundations and destiny of the Western nations because of the challenging consequences of the Agadir crisis of 1911. Aurobindo started his reflection upon Indian history because of his sensitive reactions against the behaviour of a mechanical, soulless, alien Western imperialism in India. He wanted to decipher the causes of India's successful political and spiritual career in the past and her prostration in the present. Thus we see that philosophies of history are primarily the products of what Toynbee calls "times of troubles". Although detailed, systematic and voluminous works on the philosophy of history are mainly and primarily the product of modern Western thought we can find in the Bible, the Mahabharata and the Puranas some precious words of wisdom about the factors that lead to the rise and fall of nations. Aurobindo, as we shall see, has been influenced both by the Western philosophical writings and the Indian classics in the formulation of his own philosophy of history.

A philosophy of history must necessarily be based on certain metaphysical presuppositions. It must have some fundamental ideas about the spirit, nature and man. Sometimes these metaphysical assumptions are clearly stated as in Hegel, Marx and Toynbee. Sometimes they can only be implicit. It is not possible for a philosopher of history to be an agnostic in his fundamental assumptions. If, for example, a certain writer

[1] P.A. Sorokin, *The Crisis of Our Age*; *Social and Cultural Dynamics* (4 volumes). Sorokin interprets the thought of Petrie, Danilevsky, Spengler, Toynbee, Schubert, Berdyaev, Northrop, Schweitzer etc., as social philosophies of an age of crisis. See Sorokin, *Social Philosophies of an Age of Crisis* (Boston, 1950), pp. 1-9.

investigates the human history of a definite period only with reference to, say, psychological and psycho-analytic factors, it follows that he silently repudiates a theological anthropology, because the purely mechanical explanation even of a very limited sector of existence would not be accepted by a believer in God or spirit. In the course of the history of political thought we find that most or almost all the writers had an explicit or an implicit metaphysic. Aurobindo bases his theory of spiritual determinism in history on the basis of what he calls his realistic Advaita philosophy.[1]

2. METAPHYSICAL FOUNDATIONS OF AUROBINDO'S POLITICAL THOUGHT

(a) *The Spiritual Absolute*

The concept of a spiritual omnipotent absolute existent is central in Aurobindo's metaphysics. According to him, the notion of a spiritual infinite is the unimpeachable demand of the human mind and the spiritual soul. This infinite is referred to in the earliest scriptures of the ancient Hindus which are supposed to contain the records of the esoteric supra-intellectual realizations of the great seers and mystics.[2] Beyond the reaches of the logical mind is the supernal Sachchidananda which is not Sat *plus* Chit *plus* Ananda, but is the fundamental reality which is simultaneously and indivisibly the existent, consciousness-force and supreme delight. The Sachchidananda is attained by mystical and gnostic experience but since even this concept of Sachchidananda is a logical expression of the human finite mind it does not reveal fully the ineffable supra-conceptual infinite utter ultimate. But for intellectual formulation the Sachchidananda is the absolute reality. In its operation and being, this highest reality is not bound by the law of contradiction which after all is a construction of the human mind for limited and effective action in the world of multiplicity.[3] The

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *Letters, First Series*, p. 61.

[2] V.P. Varma, "Some Aspects of the Origins of the Upanishadic Religion and Philosophy in the Vedas", *Journal of the Bihar Research Society*, Dec. 1950.

[3] Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 104. *The Life Divine* was published in two volumes by the Arya Publishing House, Calcutta. The second edition of both the volumes (1st volume, 1943, 2nd volume, 1944) has been consulted and all references in this book are to this edition, unless otherwise stated.

supreme spirit has three eternally real poises; the supra-cosmic transcendence, the cosmic universality or the aspect of Isvara and the unique separate individuality.[1] These poises are equally essential and fundamental and the supreme reality is all these simultaneously.[2] The self-existence of the absolute involves three statuses: individuality, commonalty and essentiality. However, the first two are only the true and eternal powers of the essentiality.[3]

The absolute has an aspect of active consciousness as well as an aspect of a passive or silent consciousness[4] but they are not different and opposite entities. The silent and static aspect of the infinite represents illimitable eternal immobility. This point of view has been emphasized in the philosophy of the monistic Vedanta. The dynamic aspect represents the free infinite self-creation in terms of multiplicity, motion and colossal action. This dynamic side of the absolute existence is revealed in the creation of the world, and in analyzing Aurobindo's political philosophy we shall be concerned with it. But these two aspects are not different, contradictory and irreconcilable; they are the same reality in two phases or aspects.

There are fundamental spiritual determinates of the three primal aspects of the absolute.[5] The determinates of Sat or Existence are first, the Atman or the cosmic self; secondly, the Purusha or the individual conscious being in all existence and thirdly, the Isvara, the supreme divine being aware of itself

[1] Sri Aurobindo finds parallels of the conceptions of the transcendent, the cosmic and the individual divine also in Christianity and Islam—Sri Aurobindo, *The Riddle of This World*, pp. 71-5.

[2] The supreme utter real is an integral being and is the unity of ineffable trans-cosmic superconscience, the cosmic universality and the individual self.

[3] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 106.

[4] *The Life Divine*, vol. I, p. 33. According to the interpretation put upon *The Isha Upanishad* by Aurobindo, there are two modes of Prakriti. The first mode is intensive in self-absorption and is proper to the pure and silent Brahman. The second mode is diffusive in self-extension and is proper to the active Brahman. See Sri Aurobindo, *The Isha Upanishad*, p. 55.

[5] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, pp. 24-5. According to Aurobindo there are two sides of the nature of the absolute. (*i*) The indeterminable pure infinite essence or being in substance and status, an aspect of illimitable, stable, eternal immobility and silence. (*ii*) Free and infinite self-determination or becoming in form and movement. It is an aspect of infinite mobility and self-creative dynamism and force of being. The first or indeterminable aspect refers to the state of self-reservation. The second aspect refers to a motion of self-giving and self-deploying—"like the stillness of a reservoir and the coursing of the channels which flow from it". See also Sri Aurobindo, *Bases of Yoga*, p. 27.

as the all-being. The supreme Isvara is the unification of eternal being with eternal consciousness-force.[1] The fundamental determinates of Chit (self-awareness) appear in three forms—first, Maya, the power of the absolute consciousness conceptively creative of all things; secondly, Prakriti, the dynamic force working under the guidance of the supreme spirit and thirdly, Sakti which is both conceptively creative and dynamically executive. The fundamental determinates of Ananda are love, joy and beauty.[2] But in spite of these real self-determinations the supreme reality is not bound or limited by them.[3] The power of self-determination through an infinite multiplicity is always in the Brahman, or the supreme reality, in a potential form.

Besides the power of self-variation the Brahman has two other powers—self-limitation and self-absorption. By its power of individualizing self-limitation each product of the self-variation of the Brahman must know its own truth or nature. The power of cosmic self-limitation results in the possibility of multiple action in the universe. There are two aspects of the power of self-absorption which is the third aspect of the power of the spirit—the luminous form of eternal supra-conscience and the dark form of inconscience. Out of this inconscience which is the absolute in the aspect of total nescience the universe is evolved.

Aurobindo distinguishes his own philosophy from noumenalism according to which the cosmos is the work of Mind, Thought or Idea. He also differentiates between his thought-pattern and the idealistic school according to which a relation exists between the truth behind and the conceptive phenomenon in front.[4] He claims to go "farther in idealism" because he conceives of the creative idea as a Real Idea or the Rig Vedic *Rit-Chit* (Truth-Consciousness). The supramental Real-Idea[5] organizes real-ideas in a perfect coherent form before they are cast into the mental-vital-material structure.[6] Aurobindo's

[1] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, pp. 223-4.

[2] Cf. Sri Aurobindo, *The Isha Upanishad*, pp. 54-5, for a slightly different account of the manifestation of Sachchidananda.

[3] The supreme reality is not incapable of real self-determination but in its plenary and original freedom it is not limited or bound by its determinations.

[4] *The Life Divine*, vol. I, pp. 139-40. [5] *The Life Divine*, vol. I, p. 154.

[6] It is doubtful whether Aurobindo is justified in making this claim. What his philosophy at this point amounts to, is a fusion of the Vedantic conception of the Brahman with the Platonic conception of the ideas. For a different view see

metaphysics, although conceiving the absolute as having both a static motionless and a dynamic side, is emphatic in its assertion of the aspect of supra-cosmic transcendence or essentiality, and therein it is different from the metaphysics of Hegel and Bradley and akin to the traditions of ancient metaphysical Vedantism. Although conceived of as having different poises, Aurobindo's absolute is not a relational whole.

Delight is a fundamental aspect of the absolute. First, there is the delight of the immutable being and self-existence, represented by the Brahman in its aspect of supra-cosmic self-sufficient ineffable silence. Secondly, there is also the delight of fundamental immense creativity expressed through manifested becoming and mutation. The supreme spirit is not merely a mathematician working out a cosmic sum in numbers or a thinker but also a lover, a musician, a child and a poet.[1] Brahman, the original being of light, wants to make "adventures" by plunging into the unknown depths of the abyss.[2] It wants a taste of the possibilities of the divine in ignorance and inconscience.[3] By the will of the Brahman, which becomes force or Tapas or Chit-Sakti, the worlds are created.[4] In the Brahman there is a supreme will which is a self-concretizing force, becoming what it sees and knows in itself.[5] The delight of being of the Brahman begot the Idea and the Idea embracing force created the worlds.[6] Hence Aurobindo says: "Delight cognising variety of itself, seeking its own variety, as it were, becomes the universe."[7]

The will to create is an imperative need[8] of a supreme self-effectuating force working through self-concentration and self-diffusion and demonstrates the power of the absolute to manifest and realize itself in time because it wants to enjoy

S.K. Maitra, "Sri Aurobindo and Plato", in the *Sri Aurobindo Mandira Annual, Jayanti Number* 9, 1950, pp. 119-39.

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *Thoughts and Glimpses*, p. 10.

[2] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, pp. 944-5. Also *The Riddle of This World*, p. 99: The being of light wanted to know "the depths of the abyss".

[3] *The Isha Upanishad*, p. 92; *The Life Divine*, vol. II, pp. 338-9.

[4] Sri Aurobindo, *Thoughts and Glimpses*, p. 11; Cf. *The Isha Upanishad*, pp. 92-5, where the three higher worlds Satyaloka, Tapoloka and Janaloka, the three lower worlds Bhurloka, Bhuvarloka, Swarloka and the intermediate world the Maharloka are discussed.

[5] Sri Aurobindo, *The Isha Upanishad*, p. 92.

[6] Sri Aurobindo, *Thoughts and Glimpses*, p. 11.

[7] *The Isha Upanishad*, p. 54.

[8] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 207.

self-expression in the figures of relative and phenomenal consciousness[1] by representing itself in the values of life. But although Aurobindo accepts that there is a divine will immanent in the universe his system is not an example of pantheistic metaphysics because the world is regarded as an emanation depending upon the Brahman which manifests it but is not limited by it.[2] Everything—mind, life and matter—is a manifestation of the Brahman.[3]

Time and space are that one absolute conscious-being viewing itself in extension. Time refers to subjective extension and space to objective extension[4] and hence space and time are "only conventions and arrangements of perception, the perspective in God's creative Art."[5]

(*b*) *Spiritual Involution and Evolution*

Aurobindo's philosophy of the universe emphasizes the double mechanism of involution and evolution. The central force which makes them possible is the supermind. The supermind is the nature of the divine being, not in its aspect of absolute immutable self-existence but in its action as the lord and creator of its own worlds.[6] It is the pure divine ideation and formation of the absolute, organized as a real agent and instrument of conscious being. It is an organizing self-knowledge omnipresent in the universe andis the source and keeper of law in the world.[7]

[1] *The Life Divine*, vol. I, p. 44.

[2] Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Part I (Madras, Sri Aurobindo Library, 1948), p. 255.

[3] Sri Aurobindo, *Dharma Aur Jatiyata* (Hindi translation by Deva Narayan Dwivedi, Banaras, 1934, Third Edition), p. 10.

[4] *The Life Divine*, vol. I, p. 161.

[5] Sri Aurobindo, *The Yoga and Its Objects*, p. 13. Cf. *The Life Divine*, vol. II, pp. 80-1: "In any case, if Spirit is the fundamental reality, Time and Space must either be conceptive conditions under which the Spirit sees its own movement of energy or else they must be fundamental conditions of the Spirit itself which assume a different appearance or status according to the status of consciousness in which they manifest." Sri Aurobindo refers to such mystical concepts as "fundamental spiritual reality of Time-Space", "subjective Space-extension" and "a pure spiritual space". Some modern sociologists advocate the concept of social space.

[6] *The Life Divine*, vol. I, pp. 159-60; for the difference between the ontological status of the supermind and the Sachchidananda see Sri Aurobindo, *Lights on Yoga*, pp. 32-3; *The Riddle of This World*, p. 6; Sri Aurobindo, *More Lights on Yoga*, pp. 8-9.

[7] According to Aurobindo, the supermind has three movements or triple status:
(*a*) Comprehending consciousness—basis of unity of things.
(*b*) Apprehending consciousness—supports multiplicity.
(*c*) Projecting consciousness—supports diversified individuality.

The supermind is the Sachchidananda, "not resting in its pure infinite invariable consciousness, but proceeding out of this primal poise, or rather upon it as a base and upon it as a continent into a movement which is its form of Energy and instrument of cosmic creation".[1] The supramental truth-consciousness is therefore the creative medium of self-manifestation of the absolute and is the integral unity of self-awareness and all-awareness.[2] The supermind creates the world and having created it is secretly operative in it. In the process of this creative mechanism of the supermind are inherent the processes of involution and evolution.[3] The divine being descends into inconscience for evolutionary progression.[4] In other words, it is involved in inconscience and out of inconscience it evolves again. The concept of involution is based on the simple logic that only that can evolve or come out which is already involved. Out of nothing, nothing comes. "The Divine descends from pure existence through the play of Consciousness-Force and Bliss and the creative medium of Supermind into cosmic being; we ascend from matter through a developing life, soul and mind and the illuminating medium of Supermind, towards the divine being. The knot of the two, the higher and the lower hemisphere, is where mind and Supermind meet with a veil between them."[5] The universe then is a refraction of the divine existence, an inverted order of ascent and descent, thus ranged:

Existence	Matter
Consciousness-Force	Life
Bliss	Psyche
Supermind	Mind[6]

[1] *The Life Divine*, vol. I, pp. 174-5.
[2] Sri Aurobindo, *Letters: First Series*, p. 17.
[3] For the distinction between the original supermind and the evolutionary supermind, *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 821. Radhakrishnan, in *An Idealist View of Life*, p. 305, also refers to "the stuff of spirit or supermind". Sir John Woodroffe, in "The World As Power" in *Power As Mind* (Madras, 1922), p. xiii, says "Supermind is Brahman".
[4] Cf. *The Rigveda*, X, 129, 3.
[5] *The Life Divine*, vol. I, p. 310. In quoting from Aurobindo's books we have left out the capitals and used small letters for words generally written with small letters, e.g. matter, space, time, etc.
[6] *The Life Divine*, vol. I, p. 319.

Aurobindo traces this theory of involution and evolution also in *Heraclitus* according to whom the cosmos represents the involution and evolution of the one eternal principle of Fire[1]—at once the one substance and the one force—which he expresses as the upward and the downward road. Vivekananda traced this concept of involution in the ancient Hindu philosophy. He says: ". . . this whole chain, is the involution of that cosmic life which is everywhere. It is this one mass of intelligence which from the protoplasm up to the most perfected man is slowly and slowly uncoiling itself."[2] "First it got involved and became finer, and out of that fine something which was the cause, it has gone on evolving, manifesting itself and becoming grosser."[3]

The supreme reality is involved in inconscience through the power of self-absorption, and evolution proceeds out of that. Aurobindo beautifully describes this in a poem entitled "Shiva: The Inconscient Creator":

> This was the closed mute and burning source
> Whence were formed the worlds and their star-dance;
> Life sprang a self-rapt inconscient Force,
> Love, a blazing seed, from that flame-trance.[4]

Evolution is the mechanism of the liberation of the supreme spirit from its voluntary imprisonment in the material inconscience. This is possible by the appearance of consciousness in what seems to be the inconscient.[5] "All evolution is in essence a heightening of the force of consciousness in the manifest being so that it may be raised into the greater intensity of what is still unmanifest, from matter into life, from life into mind, from the mind into the spirit."[6] By this evolutionary process an increasing perfection is achieved because of the continual descent of a higher and higher power of consciousness. Aurobindo traces the roots of this idea also in the Tantric

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *Heraclitus* (Calcutta, 1947), p. 28.
[2] Swami Vivekananda's lecture on "Immortality", *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati edition, 1945), Part II, p. 228.
[3] *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. II, pp. 227-9.
[4] *Six Poems of Sri Aurobindo* (Chandarnagar, Rameshwar & Co., 1934), p. 10.
[5] *The Teaching and the Ashrama of Sri Aurobindo*, p. 8.
[6] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 528.

conception of the "hero-seekers" and the "divine-seekers".[1]

Evolution is a mechanism of two significant processes—ascent and integration. "An evolution of forms of Matter more and more subtly and intricately organised so as to admit the action of a growing, a more and more complex and subtle and capable organisation of consciousness is the indispensable physical foundation. An upward evolutionary progress of the consciousness itself from grade to higher grade, an ascent, is the evident spiral line or emerging curve that, on this foundation, the evolution must describe."[2] Ascent signifies the growing manifestation of the inherent unmanifest consciousness-force. This process of ascent is not yet complete in the course of evolutionary progression because the supramental force has not yet descended for the purpose of total transmutation.

Integration as a process in evolution signifies the reconciliation and harmonization of the higher and the lower states of being. "A taking up of what has already been evolved into each higher grade as it is reached and a transformation more or less complete so as to admit of a total changed working of the whole being and nature, an integration, must be also part of the process, if the evolution is to be effective."[3] The higher principles descend into the lower and make their transformation possible. This process of integration has a remarkable similarity to the Hegelian concept of synthesis which reconciles the contradiction of the thesis and the antithesis. Whitehead's theory of ingression which "refers to the particular mode in which

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *The Riddle of This World*, pp. 93-4. Sri Aurobindo and some of his disciples have tried to find the roots of the philosophical theory of Ascent and Descent in the Tantric philosophy as well as in Sri Ramakrishna Paramhamsa's conception of *Ishwarakoti* and *Jivakoti*. I would like to ascribe a Platonic root to this concept of Ascent and Descent. In Plato's *Republic*, Book VII, p. 519, it is written: "... they must continue *to ascend* until they arrive at the good; but when they have ascended and seen enough we must not allow them to do as they do now. What do you mean? I mean that they remain in the upper world but this must not be allowed; they must be made *to descend* again among the prisoners in the den, and partake of their labours and honours." Plato prescribes an ascent from the sensuous and phenomenal world to the archetypal world of ideas, culminating in the realization of the Idea of the Good. He then prescribes a descent to the lower world again for the sake of reforming it. This idea is symbolically represented as the ascent from the cave to the sun and again the descent from the realm of the sun to the cave.

[2] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 500. [3] *Ibid.*

the potentiality of an eternal object is realised in a particular actual entity contributing to the definiteness of that actual entity"[1] is similar to Aurobindo's principle of integration through the descent of the higher powers. The concept of integration is very significant in Western biology and also appears in Herbert Spencer along with the principle of differentiation. But Aurobindo differs from Western biology in his great emphasis on the spiritual governance of the processual transformation and on the transmutation of the lower by the higher. Thus his theory is differentiated from the mechanical idea of a structural integration of the separate parts.[2] The consummation of the triple process of foundation, ascent and integration results in the evolutionary self-building of spirit on the base of matter. Thereby, an evolution in the inconscience and an evolution in the ignorance is replaced by an evolution in knowledge. "The principle of the process of evolution is a foundation, from that foundation an ascent, in that ascent a reversal of consciousness and, from the greater height and wideness gained, an action of change and new integration of the whole nature. The first foundation is Matter; the ascent is that of Nature; the integration is an at first unconscious or half-conscious automatic change of Nature by Nature. But as soon as a more completely conscious participation of the being has begun in these workings of Nature, a change in the functioning of the process is inevitable. The physical foundation of Matter remains, but Matter can no longer be the foundation of the consciousness; consciousness itself will be no longer in its origin a welling up from the Inconscient or a concealed flow from an occult inner subliminal force under the pressure of contacts from the universe. The foundation of the developing

[1] A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York, 1941), pp. 31, 54, 225, 329, 411.

[2] It will be interesting to note in this connexion the concept of emergence as popularized by Morgan and Alexander. S. Alexander says: "Quality is something empirical which in every case but that of motion is seen to emerge from a level of existence lower than itself; and as to motion it is to be described indifferently as empirical or categorical. . . .Each new type of existence when it emerges is expressible completely or without residue in terms of the lower stage, and therefore indirectly in terms of all lower stages; mind in terms of living process, life in terms of physico-chemical process, sense-quality like colour in terms of matter with its movements, matter itself in terms of motion. . . Life we have seen is a selection from a larger whole, of physico-chemical processes." (*Space, Time and Deity*, II, pp. 68-9). But although there are partial methodological and processual similarities in Alexander and Aurobindo, their fundamental theoretical framework is different.

existence will be the new spiritual status above or the unveiled soul status within us; it is a flow of light and knowledge and will from above and a reception from within that will determine the reactions of the being to cosmic experience."[1]

In the upper hemisphere creation is impelled by the original and supreme self-consciousness of the infinite because it is the work of the supermind unadulterated by the least degree of nescience. In the lower worlds creation involves the principle of ignorance which is born out of inconscience. This difference between the creative mechanisms of the two worlds necessitates the discovery of the hidden or inexplicit spiritual rationale in the facts and events of terrestrial and political history. The spectacle of evil deeds, disasters, catastrophes, retrogressions, violence, hate and frustration which we find in the historical records of all civilizations is explained by the working of the separatist, egocentric and partial ignorance[2] which prevents the transmutation of the force of historical causation into the self-concretizing effectuations of a supernal self-delight. This difference in the mechanism of the creative process in the different spheres has been very well expressed by Aurobindo in a poem entitled "The Life Heavens":

> I, Earth, have a deeper power than Heaven;
> My lonely sorrow surpasses its rose-joys,
> A red and bitter seed of the raptures seven;—
> My dumbness fills with echoes of a far Voice.[3]

The super-terrestrial spheres are not evolutionary but typal and they manifest in some limited potency of perfection the dynamics of the spirit and they do not aspire after transcendence. But in the lower worlds the divine being is imprisoned in the relativistic and phenomenal multiplicity necessitating an evolutionary effort to regain the kingdom of the resplendent effulgence.

The supreme reality is involved in inconscience[4] and

[1] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 526.

[2] Ignorance or Avidya, according to Aurobindo, has its origin in some self- absorbed concentration of Tapas or of the conscious-force in action. It represents "Nature's purposeful oblivion of the Self and the All" in order to effectuate some purpose of hers.

[3] *Six Poems of Sri Aurobindo* (Chandarnagar, Rameshwar & Co., 1934), p. 18.

[4] *The Life Divine*, vol. I, p. 343. Consciousness admits the separative principles and enters by "obscuring, infinitesimal fragmentation—*tuchhyena*, into the material inconscience".

evolution proceeds therefrom. Since the process of involution means on the part of the divine being an increasingly exclusive concentration and a growing entropy of self-concealment, hence by a gradual revelation and a progressive accentuation of the force of the creative Real-Idea the evolutionary process is governed. The first category in the evolutionary process is matter. There "is a conceptive self-extension of being which works itself out in the universe as a substance or object of consciousness and which Cosmic Mind and Life in their creative action represent through atomic division and aggregation as the thing we call matter. But this matter, like Mind and Life, is still Being or Brahman in its self-creative action. . . Matter is Sachchidananda represented to His own mental experience as a formal basis of objective knowledge, action and delight of existence."[1] In the process of movement of the power of the spirit, matter is the first and foundational element. On this as a basis and matrix are evolved other elements. The realization of spiritual consciousness would reveal that matter really is a form of spirit, it is the veiled or concealed spirit.[2] Matter is not, as it has been imagined by some physicists to be, the pure spontaneous externalization of self-existent Energy but is the action of a spiritual force of consciousness and being.[3] "Matter is at once a force and a substance. Matter is original being, Brahman made concreate in atomic division. Matter is original substance-force, Brahman-Sakti, made active in an obscure involution of the Spirit's powers in a self-forgetful nescience. Matter-force casts matter-substance, material Sakti casts Matter Brahman into form expressive of its own most characteristic power."[4]

Matter as thus conceived by Aurobindo is different from the notion of matter in the systems of Democritus, Leucippus, Hobbes or Marx. Among the latter, whether matter be conceived as inert or as having a mechanical motion or as being inherently and dialectically mobile, it is all the time regarded as on original constituent stuff. It may be atomic or it may be of the type of electro-magnetic energy, but never is it the

[1] *The Life Divine*, vol. I, pp. 288-9.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 453.
[3] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, pp. 438-9.
[4] *Bulletin of the Aurobindo Ashrama*, 1951, No. 4, p. 8

externalization, in a dense rigid form, of an original spirit. "Force and Existence made one in Bliss, Sachchidananda, this is the eternal reality of things. But that Force is not motion, it is Knowledge or Idea. Knowledge is the source of motion, not motion of Knowledge."[1] Hence according to Aurobindo, the basic and foundational reality is spiritually conceived and matter, force or energy are only its crystallizations and concretizations.

There are different types of matter according to Aurobindo.[2] First, matter is conceived as a physico-chemical entity. Secondly, vitalized matter—when matter becomes the receptacle of living organisms. When matter responds to the vibrations and movements of a mental organism it is regarded as mentalized matter. Lastly, there is the spiritualized matter when matter serves the purposes of spiritualized gnostic individuals. Thus we see that since the ultimate reality behind matter is spirit, Aurobindo's conception of matter is not akin to that of the materialist's, but to that of Leibnitz.

From matter as a basis and under the impulsion and pressure of cosmic forces, life is evolved.[3] Life comes out of matter because according to the Vedantic formula life is already involved in matter.[4] Matter is a form of veiled life, life a form of veiled consciousness. Aurobindo refers to the researches of J.C. Bose and hopes that if right instruments could be made, additional points of similarity could be discovered between plants and metals.[5] If rudimentary life could be found in metals then it could also be found in earth substances akin to the

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of the Karmayogin* (Calcutta, 1945), p. 52.

[2] Nolini Gupta's article in the *Sri Aurobindo Mandira Annual*, 1942, pp. 7-8.

[3] P.T. Raju in *Idealistic Thought of India* (George Allen, London, 1953), pp. 302-3, says: "He [Aurobindo] says that matter evolves into life, and life into mind; and mind, of course, through its own exertions, becomes the Brahman." This is a misleading interpretation for several reasons. Mind and life do not evolve automatically but under the superintendence of the all-governing supramental consciousness and force. Raju, however, does acknowledge the role of the supramental in evolution by referring, a few lines later, to the Sakti of the Brahman. But it is a mistake to say that according to Aurobindo, matter evolves into life and life into mind. Matter is only the foundational receptacle on the organization of which life is evolved by the supermind. Similarly life is the fundamental system on the basis of which mind is evolved by the supermind. It is also a misinterpretation to say that mind through its own exertions becomes the Brahman. Efforts, heroic efforts, no doubt, are necessary but the divinization of man or the transfiguration of the human consciousness into the Brahman must come through the cooperation and grace of the Divine.

[4] *The Life Divine*, vol. I, pp. 3-4.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 166.

metal.[1] Hence by emphasizing the continuity and all-pervasiveness of life it could be shown that a cosmic life-force was operating in the universe. Life, as thus conceived by Aurobindo, is a cosmic effectuation of the consciousness-force or Tapas, of the supreme reality. It is the base upon which mind emerges. The principle of cosmic life as individualized in separate ego-endowed bodies of human beings has to reconcile three basic limitations, death, desire and disability. These limitations are only due to the workings of the limited ego and the full descent of the supernal supramental gnosis and force would lead to the transmutation of these threefold inferior formulations respectively into immortality, bliss and power. Life, according to Aurobindo, is not an ultimate category as conceived, for example, in the vitalistic biology of Lamarck or in the creative vitalistic evolutionism of Bergson. Life is only a "subjective supra-physical instrument of the Spirit".[2] Interpreting the concept of *Matarisva* in the cosmology of the Upanishads as the life-principle Aurobindo says: "Life is a manifestation of the Brahman, in Brahman the Life Principle arranges a harmony of the seven principles of conscious being by which that manifestation works out its involution and evolution. In Brahman Matarisva disposes the waters, the sevenfold movement of the divine existence."[3]

The third emergent category in the process of evolution is mind. Just as matter is only a subordinate power of the existence aspect of the supreme reality and life a subordinate power of its energy aspect, so mind is only a subordinate power of the supremind. ". . . the divided mortal mind, parent of limitation and ignorance and the dualities is only a dark figure of the Supermind, of the self-luminous divine Consciousness in its first dealing with the apparent negation of itself from which our cosmos commences. . . ."[4] Mind is an intermediate power of consciousness with matter and life below it and the superconscient heights above it.[5] Mind helps the process of the

[1] *Ibid.* [2] Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle* (Sri Aurobindo Ashrama, Pondichery, 1949), pp. 310-1.
[3] Sri Aurobindo, *The Isha Upanishad*, p. 84.
[4] *The Life Divine*, vol. I, Chapter XXI, "The Ascent of Life", p. 239.
[5] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 583: "Matter itself is a product of Energy, and mind and life must be regarded as superior products of the same Energy. If we admit the existence of a cosmic Spirit, the Energy must be Spiritual; life and mind must be

universal manifestation but it is never given in Aurobindo's system the vast creative potencies attributed to it in the systems of subjective idealism like those of the Vijnanavadi Buddhists, Berkeley and Fichte. It is not quite distinct from its own life-matter in the animal world but it becomes a separate principle in that of man.

Conceived as a secondary power in the process of manifestation, mind has different aspects and hence different names. There is a thinking mind, a dynamic mind and an externalizing mind.[1] There is a vital mind mediating between the vital emotion and mental proper. There is also a mechanical mind representing a much lower action of the mental-physical. There are four layers of the *antahkaran*—*Citta* or the store-house of memory, *Manas* which provides the materials of thought, *Buddhi*, the real instrument of conceptual thought and fourthly the faculty active in intuitive perceptions, discernment, inspiration of speech and direct vision of knowledge.[2] Being a mystic, Aurobindo is critical of the "bottomless aggressive ignorance" and "the petty self-confident knowledge of the mind".[3] He thinks it possible that with another construction of the mind and the senses a different account of the cosmos could be given and hence it is ridiculous to construct the information and half-knowledge imparted by the mind as philosophic ultimates.[4]

Between the mind and the supermind there are four other faculties of knowledge—higher mind, illumined mind, intuition[5] and overmind.[6] The emergence of mind-endowed man in the

independent products of a spiritual energy and themselves powers of manifestation of the Spirit."

[1] Sri Aurobindo in *More Lights on Yoga*, pp. 24-5, distinguishes between the thinking mind, the dynamic mind, the externalizing mind, the vital mind, the mechanical mind and the physical mind. See also *Letters, First Series*, pp. 175-80.

[2] Sri Aurobindo, *A System of National Education* (Calcutta, Arya Publishing House, 1948), pp. 7-12.

[3] Sri Aurobindo, *The Mother*, p. 77.

[4] Sri Aurobindo, *The Riddle of This World*, p. 34.

[5] P.T. Raju in *Idealistic Thought of India* (London, George Allen, 1953), p. 302, says that in Aurobindo's thought "Intuition alone is perfect knowledge" or "intuition, as the highest form of knowledge, implies the identity of the knower and the known". But this is a misinterpretation. According to Aurobindo intuition is operative only at the intermediate levels. Beyond intuition there are other layers. Perfect knowledge is obtained, according to Aurobindo, not by intuition as Raju opines but through the supermind. The overmind and the supermind lie beyond intuition.

[6] According to Aurobindo intuition has fourfold powers: (*i*) a power of revelatory truth-seeing, (*ii*) a power of inspiration or truth-hearing, (*iii*) a power of truth-touch

evolutionary process leads to certain changes in that process. Before the appearance of man the dominant trend in the process was physical and structural organization and integration. Henceforward begin conscious and deliberate attempts in the direction of the harmonization of the mental processes.[1] We find at this stage the operation of the processes of downward integration and inward psychicization. The evolutionary progression, according to Aurobindo, is immanent with a spiritual teleology. He lays significant stress on the role of the psychic being. There is a subtle and noble principle of evolution —psychicization or the manifestation of the powers of the *Chaitya Purusha*. While ascent and integration refer to the upward and downward processes of the spiritual force, psychicization refers to inward growth. According to Aurobindo, the individual soul is the product of a divine "plunge" into self-oblivion which generates the sense of separative consciousness and leads to the loss of the sense of divine identity. The formation of the organic structure of the body which is the habitation of the soul and the seat of its effective execution as a separate agent is a consequence of the desire of the divine for multiple action in the world. There are two forms of the central being or the soul—the *Jivatman* and the *Chaitya Purusha*.[2] The *Jivatman* is above the manifestation in life and presides over it. It is prior to evolution. The psychic being is behind the manifestation. It stands behind mind, body and life. It is not prior to evolution but is evolutionary. The psychic being proceeds from and represents the *Jivatman*. This psychic being or *Chaitya Purusha* is "the concealed witness and control, the hidden Guide, the Daemon of Socrates, the inner light and inner vioce of the mystic. It is that which endures and is imperishable in us from birth to birth, untouched by death, decay or corruption".[3] The psychicization process or the psychic transformation in evolution refers to the development of the *Chaitya Purusha* in order that the human surface life, mind

or immediate seizing of significance, and (*iv*) a power of true and automatic discrimination of the orderly and exact relation of truth to truth. *The Life Divine*, vol. II, "The Ascent towards Supermind", p. 799.

[1] *The Teaching and the Ashrama of Sri Aurobindo* (Chandarnagar, Rameshwar & Co., 1934), p. 9.

[2] Sri Aurobindo, *Lights on Yoga*, pp. 25-6.

[3] *The Life Divine*, vol. I, p. 344.

and matter may be illumined by it.[1] Rebirth is related to the psychicization aspect of the evolutionary process because the psychic being, in working out his cosmic relations with the supreme spirit, has to assume a body and one birth leads to another and so on. According to Aurobindo, the progressive evolution of the spirit in the cosmos has its counterpart in the progressive evolution of the human soul through different births.[2]

(c) *Critique of Darwinism*

Basically and primarily Aurobindo has constructed a theory of cosmic evolution like the Samkhya philosophers of ancient India, Aristotle, Hegel and Spencer. The limited and specific problem of organic evolution and the biological transmutation of the species is not central in him.[3] But Aurobindo does not accept the concept of human evolution from the anthropoid ape although he accepts the prior existence of an animal-like man.[4] He accepts the idea of the birth of the logical mentality of man from an animal nature. He says: "... a divine progression of which the birth of thinking and aspiring man from the animal nature was only an obscure preparation and a far-off promise."[5] He refers to the acceptance of the priority of the lower forms of life in Indian thought.[6] According to the older prose Upanishads cows and horses were created first and then came man. The Puranas accept that the Tamasic animal creation temporally preceded that of man. The Tantrik systems

[1] The total reversal of the commonplace consciousness into the plenary creative force of the supreme spirit will involve a process of triple transformation—psychic transformation, spiritual transformation and supramental transformation. Thus psychicization is one of the most significant elements in the Yogic technique of Aurobindo.

[2] Sri Aurobindo, *The Problem of Rebirth* (Pondichery, Sri Aurobindo Ashrama, 1952), p. 42: "Rebrith is the only possible machinery for such a soul-evolution."

[3] According to Aurobindo, *Letters, First Series*, p. 62, there is an evolution of consciousness and an evolution of the spirit in things and only outwardly an evolution of species.

[4] "It has not yet been really established that ape-kind developed into man for it would rather seem that a type resembling the ape, but always characteristic of itself and not of apehood, developed within its own tendencies of nature and became what we know as man, the present human being." *The Life Divine*, vol. II, pp. 654, 657, 670.

[5] Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, p. 334.

[6] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, pp. 663-4.

speak of a soul fallen from its status passing through several millions of births in plant and animal forms before it can reach the human level and be prepared for emancipation.[1] According to Aurobindo heredity only affects strongly the external being and man brings most of his predispositions and tendencies of reaction to the universal nature from past lives.[2]

Darwin had received the incentive to his biological researches from the economic theories of Malthus which emphasized a constant tension between the increase in the sources of food supply which rise according to the law of arithmetical progression and the growth of population which takes place according to the law of geometrical progression. In its social and political implications, Darwinism emphasized the concept of struggle. Ludwig Gumplowicz formulated his theory of the *Rassenkampf* operating at tribal, class and national levels. The school of social Darwinists in Europe and America glorified survival as the highest value and hence the implication was drawn that the elimination of the weak could be a justifiable enterprise.[3] Behind all the Fascist and Nazi emphasis on power and war and aggression we find a vulgarized social Darwinism. The concepts of struggle and competition were suffused with a scientific appeal because they were regarded as the social implications of the biological concept of natural selection. In this sociological form social Darwinism became the intellectual instrument of an exploitationist society.

As the formulator of the spiritual theory of evolution and as a herald of the gospel of spiritualized gnostic community Aurobindo reacts against the Darwinian theory. According to him, in Darwin there are three basic terms in the process of evolution[4] — (*i*) death; (*ii*) mutual devouring, hunger and conscious desire; (*iii*) the sense of a limited room and capacity and the struggle to increase, to expand, to conquer and to possess. The Darwinian formula has been utilized to support the aggressive and pugnacious sides of life and the vital assertiveness and egocentric processes of self-preservation.[5] The neglect of

[1] *Ibid*, p. 664.

[2] Sri Aurobindo, *The Bases of Yoga*, p. 108. *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 53.

[3] Refer to the rise of social Darwinism in G. Ratzenhofer, L. Gumplowicz and Franz Oppenheimer as well as in Ammon and Schallmayer.

[4] *The Life Divine*, vol. I, pp. 240-1.

[5] *The Life Divine* (American edition), p. 194.

the evolution of life into mind and the consequent minimization of the role of the sentiments of cooperation and love is a central defect of Darwinism according to Aurobindo. Kropotkin also attacked the theory of constant social struggle from a similar standpoint. Although for the lower forms of life Vivekananda accepted the domination of struggle and competition, he held, on the basis of the Yoga philosophy of Patanjali that in the process of the higher evolution of the human race socialized and ethicized propensities and orientations also had a significant role.[1] Aurobindo is right in his attacks on social Darwinism because social life and political processes are not the unmitigated manifestations of a vitalistic competitive struggle for survival and mastery. Cooperation, mutuality and altruism are also significant social forces.[2] The role of socializing desires and sentiments in the social evolution of humanity has been emphasized, on the basis of empirical investigations, by Novicow, Kropotkin and others.[3] The difference between Aurobindo and these Western writers, however, is that the latter tend to emphasize the autonomous role of the coöperative interests of man while the former looks upon the emergence of anti-egoistic sentiments as the higher formulation of a spiritual force for the purposes of nature's evolutionary progression.

The main objections of Aurobindo to the Western theory of evolution emerge out of his spiritualistic metaphysics.[4] He attacks the mechanical and non-teleological orientation of the theory. The conception of the growth of life, mind and consciousness out of matter is another flaw in it. Aurobindo refers to the rise of vitalism and intuitionism in certain countries of Europe as a laudable reaction against the dominant materialism

[1] *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati edition, 1932), Part III, pp. 406-8. Vivekananda expounds the aphorism of Patanjali— जात्यन्तरपरिणामः प्रकृत्यापूरात् For his theory of the role of unselfishness, renunciation, love, in existence, see *The Complete Works*, Part II, Mayavati edition, 1935, pp. 352-3.

[2] According to Aurobindo there are four statuses of life: (*a*) incapacity and subjection, (*b*) struggle for existence, (*c*) cooperation and mutuality and (*d*) unity and freedom. Thus the Darwinian-Spencerian concepts of struggle, survival and natural selection refer to only one phase of vitalistic manifestation and do not cover the total dynamics of life.

[3] J. Novicow, *Les Luttes entre societes humaines et leurs phases successives* (1893); *La Critique du Darwinisme social* (Paris, 1910); P. Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid.*

[4] Sri Aurobindo, *Evolution* (Calcutta, 1944), pp. 5-11.

of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[1] In some forms of modern European psychology and metaphysics the concepts of the inconscient and the subconscient sometimes occupy significant places and Aurobindo interprets this to mean that the "rigid chain of mechanical necessity"[2] is no longer tenable. He is also critical of the theory of slow gradual straightlinear progression. This criticism arises from his acceptance of the cyclical theory in history. His view that in history there are not only slow movements but rapid progressions and transformations has resemblance to the theory of dialectical methodology. He does not accept the theory of the propagation of acquired characteristics but accepts only the inheritance of predispositions. "Heredity is only a material shadow of soul-reproduction, of the rebirth of Life and Mind into new forms. Ordinarily as a constant factor or basis, there is the reproduction of that which has already evolved; . . . it is predisposition that is chiefly inherited."[3] He likes to introduce a spiritual content into the concept of struggle. He wants not only a struggle for self-adaptation against environment but also a struggle for increasing perfection which alone can assure a continuous permanence and a lasting survival. Distinguishing his own theory of spiritual evolution from the prevalent Western form he says: "Instead of a mechanical, gradual, rigid evolution out of indeterminate Matter by Nature Force we move towards the perception of a conscious, supple, flexible, intensely surprising and constantly dramatic evolution by a superconscient knowledge which reveals things in Matter, Life and Mind out of the unfathomable Inconscient from which they rise."[4] Evolutionary progression does not cease with the appearance of the mental man but it has as its next destined goal the emergence of the gnostic superman and thereafter will come the supreme

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, p. 24: ". . . ideas inevitably subversive of any premature typal order of economic rationalism, dynamic ideas such as Nietzsche's Will-to-live, Bergson's exaltation of intuition above intellect or the latest German philosophical tendency to acknowledge supra-rational faculty and a supra-rational order of truths." Also *Arabinda Mandira Me* (in Hindi), p. 11.

[2] *Evolution*, pp. 5-11.

[3] Sri Aurobindo, *Evolution*, p. 10; *Bases of Yoga*, p. 108.

[4] Sri Aurobindo, *Evolution*, p. 11. According to Aurobindo the Samkhya theory of evolution also accepts "a development out of indeterminate Matter by Nature-force"—*Evolution*, p. 5.

consummation — the full descent even of the powers and delight of the Sachchidananda.[1]

(*d*) *Reconciliation of Vedantism and Science*

The basic merit that Aurobindo claims for his metaphysics is that it reconciles the divergent theories of ancient Vedantism and modern scientific[2] materialism and vitalism. In the Rig Veda there are references to the One Existent — *Anidavatam swadhaya tadekam*. The famous *Nasadiya* hymn refers to the primal indeterminate stuff, *Apraketam salilam*, which has led to the origination of all mutation and multiplicity.[3] The great gospel of the older Upanishads is the conception of an original spiritual reality. In the later developments of Indian thought illusionism, mentalism and subjectivism became dominant and an undue concentration on ascetic pursuits led to a minimization of the emphasis on the activities of life and social existence. In Europe, on the other hand, after the Renaissance there has been the predominance of rational science, economics and technology. The social philosophy of hedonistic utilitarianism and capitalism has led to the amassing of the commodities for a comfortable life on a staggering scale.[4] Hence the result has been a bankruptcy of spiritual orientations. Spiritualism, which has had some faint beginnings in Pythagoreanism, Platonism, Neo-Platonism, Stoicism and Christianity, has not been adequately developed by modern European thinkers. By and large, the spiritually towering philosophies of Buddha and Samkara which definitely have a world-shunning tendency have set their mighty stamp on the intellectual development of India and, by and large, atheism, agnosticism, nihilism, capitalism,

[1] According to Aurobindo, *The Riddle of This World*, p. 6, above and beyond supermind are the worlds of Sachchidananda. Hence a farther divine progression, an infinite development is still possible. Sri Aurobindo in *Lights on Yoga*, pp. 32-3, says: "One can of course realise Sachchidananda in relation to the mind, life and body also —but then it is something stable, supporting by its presence the lower Prakriti, but not transforming it. The supermind alone can transform the lower nature." In *More Lights on Yoga*, pp. 8-9, Aurobindo says: "But it is by having experience of the Sachchidananda, pure existence-consciousness-bliss, that the ascent to the supramental and the descent of the supramental become (at a much later state) possible."

[2] According to Aurobindo, *Letters, Fourth Series*, pp. 72-4, the essential significance of Einsteinean relativity can be connected with the Vedantic conclusion.

[3] The *Rig Veda* X, 129, 3, 7.

[4] *The Life Divine*, vol. I, p. 30; *The Life Divine* (American edition), p. 78.

secularism and materialism have been dominant in Europe since the eighteenth century. According to Aurobindo the soul of man is satisfied neither with the illusionistic idealism of Samkara nor with the materialistic theory of Haeckel.[1] He claims to have found in his philosophy a place both for the supernal Vedantic reality by his acceptance of the concept of the Sachchidananda, and a place for matter and life in his scheme of evolutionary progression.

Aurobindo distinguishes between two types of materialism — barbarian materialism and scientific materialism. Barbarian materialism posits the entire identification of the self with the body and hence preaches the pursuit of a sensational activism. Scientific materialism, on the other hand, identifies the self with the vital part and mind.[2] According to Aurobindo materialism can never be the final gospel for man.[3] It lacks spiritual dynamism and can only lead to vanity, helplessness and despair.[4] Physical science unaided by higher sources of knowledge can never lead to the integral growth of the whole being of man. No scientist or materialistic thinker can point to mankind its destiny[5] nor the path that leads to its realization and hence "sickness and dissatisfaction and disillusionment . . . inevitably follow a long outburst of materialism".[6]

But materialism was needed in the world and in its modern Western form it was only the logical culmination of the earthward endeavour of the European mind. It was an intellectual formula discovered by the *Zeit-Geist* to discipline the human race in certain limited fields of physical activity.[7] Aurobindo candidly recognizes the immense benefits conferred by the secularist

1 Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 44.

2 Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, pp. 91-4.

3 For a historical appreciation of materialism, F.A. Lange, *A History of Materialism* (3 volumes); M.N. Roy, *Materialism*; D. Sastri, *A Short History of Indian Materialism*; G. Plekhanov, *Essays in the History of Materialism*; V. I. Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*. In *Letters, First Series*, pp. 399-400, Aurobindo says that the nineteenth century materialism has lost its foundations. "Science itself nowadays is neither materialistic nor idealistic." Aurobindo claims to have prophesied this change in some of his poems like "A Vision of Science" and "In the Moonlight".

4 *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 532; *The Riddle of This World*, pp. 27, 29, 23; Sri Aurobindo, *The Spirit and Form of Indian Polity* (Calcutta, 1947), p. 25.

5 In *The Riddle of This World*, p. 37, Aurobindo says: ". . . neither Russell nor any materialist can tell you where you are going or even where you ought to go."

6 Sri Aurobindo, *Kalidasa* (Pondichery, 1950), p. 46.

7 Sri Aurobindo, *Evolution* (Calcutta, 1944), p. 35; *The Ideal of Human Unity* (Pondichery, 1950), p. 53.

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of Europe. Idealism on the social and political plane and a genial humanistic charity and tolerance increased in this era.[1] There has been a growth of political and religious liberty and even in the unmoralized and turbulent realms of international politics and diplomacy there has been a growing demand for the elimination of war and the maintenance of peace. The rise of the French materialism of La Mettrie, Holbach, Helvetius, Diderot and the rationalistic enlightenment led by Voltaire promulgated secularism. The growth of the anti-theological Tübingen school of Biblical criticism challenged the foundations of scholastic wisdom. Darwinism, the systems of Haeckel, Marx and Engels, the psychological materialism of Büchner, Vogt and Moleshott and others further developed the secularist trend.[2] Secularism emphasized the truths of the physical and vital realms — the realms of *Anna* and *Prana* of the Upanishadic cosmology. For an integral philosophy it is necessary that all aspects of societal and cosmic existence should be emphasized, explained and harmonized.[3] In the West there has been a genuine and necessary emphasis on the logical and scientific method of argumentation. The stress on detailed observation and controlled experimentation has led to the phenomenal growth of the physical and naturalistic sciences. There has been a rigid exclusion, in the scientific methodology, of subjectively formulated categories and predications. Science claims to analyze the procedures and properties of natural objects and phenomena in the detached spirit of objective research. The dominant consequence of the sociological and scientific investigations of the last two or three centuries has been the pronounced emphasis on logical reason, experimental science, social, economic and political freedom, humanism and an all-round concept of social and individual progress.

But notwithstanding the growth of scientific intellectual curiosity, democratic equalitarian social and political movements, the abolition of privileges and the spread of education,

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *Evolution*, pp. 28-9. According to Aurobindo the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries worshipped five godheads: (*i*) Reason, (*ii*) Science (*iii*) Progress, (*iv*) Freedom, and (*v*) Humanity.

[2] V.P. Varma, *Critique of Marxism* (Columbia University M.A. Thesis, 1948) published in *The Calcutta Review*, 1953 and 1954.

[3] As in Aristotle and Hegel.

the neglect of the spirit is a cardinal defect of the European thought and political and socio-moral life. The concept of the supreme spiritual reality which had its beginnings in the Vedas in India and in Parmenides in Greece and was formulated in different forms in Buddhism, Christian gnosticism and Sufism failed to be the predominant concern of the European peoples in spite of the attempts of Pythagoras, Plato, Plotinus and Porphyry. The recent attempts of the neo-Hegelians and Ouspensky[1] are hints that the European and Slavic mind is trying to regain the forgotten spiritual truth.

Aurobindo is aware of the baneful effects of the illusionistic and ascetic philosophies on the social and political condition of India. He candidly admits that the ascetic negation of the claims of matter and life is "more complete, more final, more perilous in its effects on individuals or collectivities that hear its potent call to the wilderness"[2] than the materialistic denial of the substantiality of the spiritual reality and consciousness. He condemns the apathetic spirit of pessimism as the negation of the power and dynamic creativism of the spirit which constantly expresses itself in the plethora of cosmic phenomena. He blames Buddhism[3] for having unduly stressed an exaggerated asceticism and nihilism which resulted in the emphasis on detachment and a desire to rid oneself of social and political claims and obligations. He reproaches Buddhism and the Samkarite Vedanta for having popularized illusionism. It is true that Aurobindo is not very accurate in his large generalizations about Buddhism and Vedantism. In the schools of Buddhist philosophy we find not only the subjective idealism of the Yogachara Vijnanvada and the Madhyamika Sunyavada but also the realistic systems of the Vaibhasikas and the Sautrantikas. Samkara's Vedanta does not teach the purely mental and illusory character of the cosmic multiplicity but accepts at least the empirical phenomenal character of the temporal world.[4] But in spite of some serious limitations of Aurobindo's

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *The Riddle of This World*, p. 27.

[2] *The Life Divine*, vol. I, p. 28.

[3] Sri Aurobindo, *Dharma Aur Jatiyata* (Hindi translation by Deva Narayan Dwivedi, Banaras, 1934), p. 24.

[4] A growing tendency towards solipsistic mentalism is found in the *Citsukhi*, the *Advaitasiddhi* and the *Yogavasistha*. This led to the formulation of the famous *Dristisristivada*.

characterizations of the Buddhistic[1] and Advaita Vedantic systems, it remains true that the sociological and political implications of these systems were definitely world-negating and pessimistic and the healthy, vital, delightful exuberance of spirit that we find in the Vedas and the older Upanishads is lost in the later metaphysical schools of Nagarjuna, Dharmakirti, Samkara and Santarakshita. Thus both materialism and spiritual illusionism have serious shortcomings.

Aurobindo claims to have constructed a metaphysics which reconciles the demands of both matter and spirit. The existence of both matter and spirit is rooted in undeniable experience and hence they have to be reconciled. According to him both spirit and matter are reconciled in cosmic and transcendental consciousness[2] and he believes he is only intellectually presenting the truth of that experience. He thinks that his philosophy of *realistic Advaita*[3] has harmonized the two fundamental categories of philosophy — spiritual reality and the material multiplicity. Thus he claims that his philosophy has got rid of the ethical and epistemological difficulties of a mere materialism. He also claims to have repudiated Samkara's doctrine of Maya[4]. This claim is fundamentally important from the standpoint of political and historical thought because there is no necessity and justification for a rational system of political thought or an all-comprehensive philosophy of human history if everything that we cognize is a mere illusion and we ourselves are only momentary ephemeral bubbles on the vast sea of primary inconscience and a total nihil. Only if the world is real has a philosophy of history and politics any meaning. Hence the concept of complete illusionism is antithetical to the growth of a sound political philosophy.

(e) *Sociological Foundations of the Critique of Mayavada in Modern Indian Thought*

Aurobindo's repudiation of Mayavada has great sociological

[1] V.P. Varma, "Sri Aurobindo's Interpretations of Buddhist Philosophy", *Journal of the Bihar Research Society* (Buddha Jayanti Special Number, 1956), pp. 99-112.

[2] *The Life Divine*, vol. I, pp. 32, 37.

[3] Sri Aurobindo, *Letters: First Series*, p. 61: "The philosophy of *The Life Divine* is such a realistic Advaita." Here realistic Advaita is differentiated from illusionistic Advaita.

[4] Several of Aurobindo's points in his criticisms of the illusionistic doctrine of

significance. The word Maya is used in the Rig Veda in the sense of power.[1] It connotes in later Vedantic thought the capacity of cosmic creation. In this sense Aurobindo accepts the concept of Maya which he calls the true or the divine Maya, referred to as the *Yogamaya* in the Gita. Divine Maya according to Aurobindo is the self-power (*Atma-Sakti*) and consciousness-force (*Chit-Sakti*) of the supreme reality.[2] It is a fundamental spiritual self-determination of the divine being. It is the supreme and the universal consciousness and is at once transcendental, cosmic and individual.[3] It is the self-force of the supreme consciousness and is conceptively creative[4] of all mutations and multiplicity. Maya is the logic of the infinite and comprehends the three-fold powers of the supreme being—the powers of self-variation, self-limitation and self-absorption.[5] He does not deny the significance of the multiple dynamism of the world but traces the source of that dynamism in a latent and seed form in the supreme absolute itself. Thus Aurobindo claims that his system is characterized by universal realism because he accepts a real universe having as its foundation a real universal and transcendent absolute. He accepts a philosophy of social and political change because the world is real.

According to Aurobindo the reality of the cosmos does not detract from the plenary freedom and original indeterminate infinite being of the Brahman. He is opposed to the illusionistic interpretation of ancient Vedanta. The denial of the reality of the world in Samkara's system is due to his "leap" from the mental plane at once to the transcendental plane.[6] Aurobindo

the unreality of the world have been anticipated by the theistic schools of Vedanta. See D.S. Sarma, *Studies in the Renaissance of Hinduism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Banaras Hindu University, 1944), p. 337.

[1] The *Rig Veda*, X, 54, 2; IX, 83, 31; V, 85, 4. In the *Rig Veda*, VI, 47, 18 is found "*Indro mayabhih pururupa iyate*"

[2] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, pp. 62-3, 247, 157. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 157.

[4] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, pp. 36-7.

[5] According to Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, vol. I, p. 139, the mistake of illusionism is that it neglects the distinction between the lower Maya and the higher divine Maya. It tends to understand the mental Maya or perhaps an Overmind as the creator of the World.

[6] Aurobindo, *The Riddle of This World*, p.93, is opposed to the spiritual experience which is satisfied with a "leap into some original unborn existence or non-existence". See also, *The Life Divine*, vol. I, p. 28. This opposition to the "leap" is a remarkably Platonic element in Aurobindo. Plato was opposed to the attempt to comprehend the Idea of Good all at once. He wanted the pursuit of philosophy to be taken up only after a rigorous study for ten years of the mathematical sciences.

claims to have escaped this conclusion because of his acceptance of the four intermediate planes of higher mind, illumined mind, intuition and overmind[1] and even the supernal plane of supermind between the planes of the normal human mind and the Sachchidananda. Illusionism in some of its forms makes the mistake of conceiving the subjective human mind as the creator of the world.[2] According to Aurobindo the world is not a mental figment of the imagination but is the creation of the higher divine Maya which is the self-concentrated, self-effectuating mechanism of the knowledge and will of Brahman.[3]

In spite of the repeated claims of the superiority of illusionistic Mayavada of the extreme monistic school as an intellectual structure we cannot be unmindful of its disastrous political consequences. The extreme type of Mayavada of Samkara, Sureshwara and Sriharsa does not find support in the ancient metaphysical Vedantism of India. Historically speaking, the philosophy of Mayavada either synchronizes with or comes after the advance of Islam in India. The political prostration of the Hindu people necessarily accentuated a cult minimizing the values of a full social and political life. In spite of some desperate modern attempts to read an axiological system of fundamental values in Samkara it remains a fact that even if Mayavada posits not the illusory but only the empirical, relativistic or pheuomenal character of the world it is antithetical

Aurobindo is opposed to the attempt to attain the transcendental height all at once from the mental plane. The similarity between Plato and Aurobindo is methodological and not with regard to their conclusions.

[1] The higher layers beyond the mind have tremendous potencies. The higher mind leads to the acquisition of truth-thought. The spontaneous knowledge obtained by it is comparable to composed and steadly sun-shine. The illumined mind provides truth-sight. The illumination obtained by it is comparable to outpouring of massive lightnings of flaming sun-stuff. Intuition provides truth-force, truth-sense. The overmind is global in character and is like a delegate of the supermind to ignorance. See *The Life Divine*, vol. I, pp. 334-5.

[2] According to the *Dristisristivada* the world is a kind of projection of the self. Gaudapada upheld a theory of *Ajatavada* and denied the appearance of the world in the past, present and the future.

[3] According to the illusionistic school of Vedanta, Brahman is *Satyam* but the World is *Mithya*. Aurobindo subscribes to the first part of the statement as he also accepts that Brahman is Satyam but he says that the world also is immanent with the secret being of Brahman. See, Sri Aurobindo, *Dharma Aur Jatyata* (Banaras, 1934), p. 36. In *The Life Divine*, Aurobindo refers to the philosophy of "universal realism" according to which the universe is real and it reposes on an universal—transcendent absolute. He says that even in the halflight or darkness man discovers the Eternal—"the Brahman who is here with this face of Maya". *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Part one, pp. 85-6.

to the construction of a typology of economic and political values and objectives. It is not favourable to social or hedonistic or utilitarian pursuits and its asceticism is bound to engender a world-shunning temperament.

I think that there are three possible reasons for the refutation of illusionistic Mayavada in modern Indian thought. The most important reason is the ascendancy of the materialistically-oriented Western civilization. Its scientific achievements have demonstrated its political superiority and vital power. Some of the Western imperialistic nations expanded their political and economic power in Asia and Africa. Western civilization had a great impact on the thought of the East. It led to a re-statement and re-valuation of the Eastern goals of life and politics and henceforward activistic, dynamic and sociological interpretations began to be offered of the older metaphysical concepts. Such a re-interpretation of Hindu philosophy we find in the works of Dayananda, Vivekananda, Ramatirtha, Tilak, Gandhi and Aurobindo. In the context of political downfall it was ridiculous to sing the glories of the beyond. The emphasis had to be put on the sanctification of dedicated work for the country. The world had to be interpreted not as illusory or unreal but as the manifestation of the Lord and hence pregnant with a rich inner significance. The Lord was to be worshipped not by cognitive contemplation alone but by serving the poor, the helpless and the exploited. The Upanishadic conception of the immanence of God was referred to in support of national work and social service. This re-interpretation of ancient Indian thought and the emphasis on its dynamic gospel was tremendously influenced by the presence of an alien imperialism. In order to harness social and political efforts what was needed was not the empty gospel of the evanescent or momentary character of the world but a theory of the world as the glorious theatre for the highest divine action.

Another reason for the refutation of Mayavada has been the generally accepted tendency in European scholars to trace the political downfall of India to its metaphysical philosophy of illusion. The self-concentrated absorption of the leaders and philosophers of Hinduism in the rapturous delights of a supra-terrestrial reality has been supposed to be one of the causes of

the political incapacity and immaturity of the Hindus. Some Western Indologists attributed the stress on the gospel of liberation from the miseries of the world, as found in the Upanishads and Buddhism, to the racial admixture between the Indo-Europeans and the aborigines. This admixture was supposed to weaken the psychosomatic structure, entailing a loss of vital enthusiasm and fervour. Hence there was great emphasis on a gospel of saving and liberating knowledge which was needed for emancipation from the trammels of a cosmic existence full of suffering and futility and despair. In modern times German Nazi leaders and thinkers attributed the political fall of India to the decline of the Vedic optimistic spirit due to racial mixture which led to the popularization of non-Aryan superstitions and creeds. Rosenberg and the Nazi anthropologist Hans Gunther have enunciated such views. Even Indian leaders of thought and action have held the Vedantic idealism and Buddhist monasticism to be at least partly responsible for the decline and fall of India. Even a great apostle of practical Vedanta like Vivekananda admitted at least once that for her regeneration India needed the combination of the brain of Vedanta and the body of Islam.[1] This indicates that even he felt that Vedantism was inadequate as a political philosophy. Because of these attacks upon Vedantic idealism in its genetic aspect, as being perhaps a product of race mixture with inferior peoples, and in its sociological aspect as at least partly responsible for the fall of India, we find in modern Indian thought a reaction against Mayavada.

The third factor for the attack against Mayavada has been the rise of modern Indian social and religious movements which do not refer to the concept of Maya in its medieval portentous powerful form. The Brahmo Samaj has been influenced by the Christian emphasis on monotheism and it refuses to regard the world as unreal. Dayananda, who wanted to revive the buoyant optimistic spirit of the Vedas and was influenced by the logical system of the realistic Nyaya and the Vaisesika, has been a very great opponent of Samakarite Mayavada. The concepts of divine immanence and social service were too strong in the Vaishnava Gandhi to make possible any theory of illusionistic Maya.

[1] *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. VI, p. 376.

Among European Indologists also there has been a growing recognition that not Samkara's Advaitavada but the Vishistadvaitavada of Ramanuja is more faithful to the traditions of ancient Vedanta.

In this larger political, sociological and philosophical perspective we have to find the reasons of the vehemence with which Aurobindo has attacked the theory of Maya. It is very true that he does not refer to these political and social factors which I have analyzed, but finds mystical and epistemological grounds for his refutation of Mayavada. But we cannot be unmindful of these other historical factors. We cannot overlook the influence upon Aurobindo of the religious traditions of Bengal, with its theistic philosophy of Baladeva and Chaitanya and its Mother cult of Tantricism and Ramakrishna. Hence we find the exultation of Subhas Chandra Bose at the philosophy of the reconciliation of matter and spirit as formulated by Aurobindo in the pages of the *Arya*. He confesses in his autobiography that although Ramakrishna and Vivekananda had helped him in getting rid of the Samkarite theory of Maya, Aurobindo was an additional help to him in the task.[1]

3. SPIRITUAL DETERMINISM IN HISTORY

(a) *History as the Fulfilment of God*

The basic concepts of Aurobindo's philosophy—Sachchidananda or the supreme spiritual reality, supermind and evolutionary progression[2], are the foundations on which is constructed a historical and political thought-structure. History on the external surface is "a confused torrent of events and personalities or a kaleidoscope of changing institutions".[3] But the constant change that is characteristic of the historical reality does not yield its real internal meaning. The spiritual dialectic of history has to be grasped.[4] In its real sense history is the revelation and

[1] Subhas Chandra Bose, *An Indian Pilgrim*, p. 73.

[2] In *More Lights on Yoga*, p. 3, Aurobindo states in almost Hegelian fashion: "The general Divine Will in the universe is for the progressive manifestation in the universe."

[3] Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 1-2.

[4] Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 1-2. Cf. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right* (Oxford, 1949): "In world history this element (the element in which the universal mind exists) is the actuality of mind in its whole compass of internality

manifestation of the spirit. "The history of the cycles of man is a progress towards the unveiling of the Godhead in the soul and life of humanity; each high event and stage of it is a divine manifestation."[1] The difference between the surface being and the subliminal being, which is a basic theory of Aurobindo's psychology, is significant also for his philosophy of history. The task of a philosophy of history is not merely to discover the general pattern of social and political causation but to find out and grasp the creative meaning and immanent soul of history. History is being perpetually created on several planes of existence. In the higher planes of typal existence, we have history but not evolutionary progression. History in the sense of an inter-linked chain of facts, events and phenomena leading to the realization of some definite goals is a characteristic of our terrestrial manifestation alone.

Aurobindo accepts the reality of an Universal Omnipresent Being or Existence "which fulfils itself in the world and the individual and the group with an impartial regard for all as equal powers of its self-manifestation".[2] History is the fulfilment of the divine spirit. The concept of fulfilment implies the dynamic concretization of the potencies of multiplicity and cosmic mutations contained in the absolute. Politics can be conceived as a fulfilment of the spirit on the historical plane.[3] The movement of Swaraj can be thus regarded as the fulfilment of God by the fulfilment of the people through their independent mode and patterns of individual, social, communal and national life.

The Aurobindian notion of the fulfilment of God through the constellations of groups, associations and collectivities is a

and externality alike . . . world history is the necessary development, out of the concept of mind's freedom alone, of the movements of reason and so of the self-consciousness and freedom of mind. This development is the interpretation and actualization of the universal mind. . . . Each of the stages of world history is the presence of a necessary moment in the Idea of the world-mind, and that moment attains its absolute right in that stage." pp. 341-5.

[1] Quoted in *Sri Aurobindo Mandira Annual*, 1942, pp. 172-3.

[2] Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, p. 7. C.R. Das also believes in a similar conception of history. He says: "For the truth of all truths is that the outer *Leela* of God reveals itself in history. Individual, Society, Nation, Humanity are the different aspects of that very *Leela*." P.C. Ray, *Life and Times of C.R. Das* (Oxford 1927), p. 278.

[3] Sri Aurobindo defines Swaraj as the "fulfilment" of our national life. *Speeches*, pp. 104-5.

new note in Indian political thought. It definitely indicates the influence of Hegel's political philosophy on Aurobindo. It is not possible to trace the roots of the conception of divine fulfilment through human groups and societies in the Bhagavadgita or the old scriptures of Hinduism. According to the Gita the concrete actions for the maintenance and betterment of the social structure that are performed by the man of philosophic wisdom and spiritual realization are not for fulfilling God but only for the sake of the society—Lokasamgraha. The transcendental Purushottama of the Gita is an eternally perfect self-sufficient being and is in no need of fulfilment. Fulfilment of God through group and associational life is definitely a Western concept. Some of the passages of the Mahabharata and the Puranas as well as the parables of the Bodhisat in the Jatakas do imply the progressive expansion and development of a man's being through social, altruistic and humanitarian service; but the notion of the fulfilment of God "by fulfilling ourselves in our individual life, in the family, in the community, in the nation, in humanity",[1] as advocated by Aurobindo, has been primarily a concept popularized in German idealistic and romantic thought and brought to England by the Hegelian idealists. But although to some of the positivist and political minds of modern India the "application of Vedanta to the fulfilment of life"[2] may appear fascinating, logically it is not possible to accept the ultimate truth of a supra-conceptual, fundamentally transcendental being and also to posit its fulfilment in terms of social and political existence. Fulfilment implies want, desire and need but the transcendent spiritual real does not experience want. The notion of fulfilment may be applied to the pure Being of Hegel but not to the Sachchidananda of the Vedanta.[3]

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches* (Pondichery, 1952), pp. 104-5.

[2] *The Life Divine*, vol. II. "But if we adhere to the larger and profounder idea that the ego is only an intermediate representation of something beyond itself, we escape from this consequence and are able to apply Vedanta to fulfilment of life" (p. 70). "We have the dissolution of this egoistic construction by the self-opening of the individual to the Universe and to God as the means of that supreme fulfilment" (p. 71).

[3] In some forms of Western idealism and neo-idealism God is conceived as an evolving concrete universal who receives fulfilment and perfection from the universe. In Indian thought, on the other hand, God is conceived as a self-closed, perfect, eternally uniform existence.

(*b*) *The Theory of "Suffering" in Relation to History*

The great stumbling-block to a spiritual theory of history is the existence of sin, suffering, evil, sorrow, pain, etc. in the world. Being an absolutist of the transcendental type Samkara does not have to face this problem because to him ultimately these things do not exist and he does not build any philosophy of history. St. Augustine and the Christian patristic and scholastic philosophers attribute the existence of the undivine and immoral elements in history to the original sin and fall of man, and conceive of a state of pure grace. A spiritual or a theological philosophy of history, in order to be acceptable, has to point out the rationale of evil, hate and murder in history because history is either the manifestation of God or is under His governance. Hegel had to face this problem and he resorts to two devices. First, he says that the world-historical individual who is the executive agent of the *Welt-Geist* does not care for the subtle ethical distinctions of a Christian moral code.[1] Secondly, Hegel accepts what he calls the "cunning of reason—that it sets the passions to work for itself, while that which develops in existence through such impulsion pays the penalty and suffers loss. For it is phenomenal being that is so treated, and of this, part is of no value, part is positive and real. The particular is for the most part of too trifling value as compared with the general: individuals are sacrificed and abandoned. The Idea pays the penalty of determinate existence and of corruptibility, not from itself but from the passions of individuals".[2] The Hegelian *Welt-Geist*, which is the Idea in its progressive march on the cosmic platform, is not an ethical being. The contradiction in Hegelian metaphysics and philosophy of history is that it accepts the concrete realization of freedom through the dialectics of "the cunning of reason". Subjective freedom Hegel conceives to be the most precious gift of Christianity but it is not congruous with our sense of right to accept that this self-determinate Christian freedom can be realized through the antithesis of hate, passion, evil and violence. In other words, to provide a logical explanation for the dominant irrationalism

[1] Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, pp. 67, 29, 31.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 33.

and immoralism of human politics and history is the basic problem in a spiritual philosophy of history; and the attempts to solve the problem—the theological determinism of St. Augustine and Bossuet or the idealistic determinism of Hegel or the new trends in Christian interpretations of history found in Nicolas Berdyaev, Barth, Niebuhr, Miller, Brunner, have failed on this fundamental issue.[1] There are only two solutions possible—either to abolish the reality of the world as Samkara does or to accept that moral criteria are irrelevant both for God and for the world. Arguing on these lines I feel that the basic problem of theology and a spiritual philosophy of history is the same—how to reconcile God and history.

Aurobindo does not want to save the divine from the burden of evil. It is the divine that is in us which upholds the burden of the fall and its dark consequences.[2] Sin or evil is merely excess and defect, wrong placement, inharmonious action and reaction.[3] Evil and sorrow are undoubtedly apparent effective negations of divine power, light and bliss. The divine being, according to Aurobindo, is attracted by the call of the unknown, the joy of danger and difficulty and adventure.[4] It is attracted by the fascination of contradictories and their difficult harmonization.[5] "It is often God's will in us to take through the mind the *bhoga* of ignorance, of dualities, of joy and grief, of pleasure and pain, of virtue and sin, of enjoyment and renunciation."[6] On the social and political plane, a wrong and partial consciousness governed by the exaggerated demands of an ego seeking vital satisfactions is the source of evil.[7] Thus conceived,

[1] N. Berdyaev, *The Meaning of History*, *Spirit and Reality*; R. Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*; Brunner, *Theology of Crisis*, *Philosophy of Religion*; Hugh Miller, *History and Science*.

[2] Sri Aurobindo, *The Riddle of This World*, p. 96.

[3] Sri Aurobindo, *The Isha Upanishad*, p. 59.

[4] Sri Aurobindo, *The Riddle of This World*, p. 98. [5] *Ibid.*

[6] Sri Aurobindo, *The Yoga and Its Objects*, pp. 1-2. In *The Life Divine*, vol II, pp. 402-3, the source of evil is traced in a wrong consciousness governed by the life-ego. Wrong and evil are the products of life-discord and disharmony.

[7] Cf. Sri Aurobindo, "Urvasie", *Collected Poems and Plays*, vol. I, p. 77.

. . . at last
Their power by excess of beauty falls,—
Thy sin, Pururavas—of beauty and love:
And this the land divine to impure grasp
Yields of barbarians from the outer shores.

evil is the function of ignorance[1] and the dawn of spiritual knowledge would lead to its elimination. The process of the origin of evil and falsehood in a philosophical sense is to be found in the surface emergence of mental and vital consciousness from the inconscience. The cause of pain and suffering is the incompleteness and weakness of the cosmic force of consciousness, manifested on the material, vital and mental levels, to assimilate or harmonize the impacts and contacts of the universal dynamism and energy thrown and cast upon it. Animal existence is marked with a greater capacity to endure suffering. But although the causes of evil, ignorance and suffering are to be traced to the egoistic and imperfect consciousness and the struggle of separate self-affirming individuals for a vitalistic existence, they are, from an ultimate standpoint, part of a divine mechanism to realize its plans on the limited plane of terrestrial history.[2] Aurobindo says: ". . . there is a cosmic and individual utility in what presents to us as adverse and evil. For without experience of pain we would not get all the infinite value of the divine delight of which pain is in travail; all ignorance is a penumbra which environs an orb of knowledge; every error signifies the possibility and the effort of a discovery of truth; every weakness and failure is a first sounding of gulfs of power and potentiality; all division is intended to enrich by an experience of the various sweetness of unification the joy of realized unity. All this imperfection is to us evil but all evil is in travail of the eternal good; for all this is an imperfection which is the first condition—in the law of life evolving out of Inconscience—of a greater perfection in the manifestation of the hidden divinity. But at the same time our present feeling of this evil and imperfection, the revolt of our consciousness against them, is also a necessary valuation; for if we have first to face and endure them, the ultimate command on us is to reject, to overcome, to transform the life and the nature. It is for that end that

[1] *The Riddle of This World*, p. 95: "Division, ego, the imperfect consciousness and groping and the struggle of a separate self-affirmation are the efficient cause of the suffering and ignorance in this world."

[2] According to Aurobindo, sometimes sufferings and misfortunes might be chosen by the soul "in order to get through the necessary experience at a rapid rate". *The Riddle of This World*, pp. 80-1. The psychic being can turn the intensest agonies, frustrations, hardships and calamities into occasions for its moral and spiritual growth.

their insistence is not allowed to slacken; the soul must learn the result of the ignorance, must begin to feel their reactions as a spur to its endeavour of mastery and conquest and finally to a greater endeavour of transformation and transcendence."[1]

The concrete manifestation of the dialectical consequences of pain and suffering in the political realm is demonstrated by Aurobindo with reference to the role of suffering in the Bengal nationalist agitation. It is his firm faith that divinely appointed strength in the individual and nations grows by suffering.[2] Without suffering and without the moral force of self-sacrifice the divinity inherent in people cannot grow. The basic point to be emphasized about the fight between Bengal nationalism and British imperialism was that Bengal was infused with a mighty moral force. This force grows by conscious sacrifice and voluntary suffering. A righteous fight waged for a just cause leads to the inward growth of nations and individuals. Aurobindo says: "Sri Krishna cannot grow to manhood unless he is called to work for others, unless the Asuric forces of the world are about him and work against him and make him feel his strength."[3]

The concept of suffering in its sociological and political application was popularized by the Jewish prophets. Almost since the Exodus from Egypt, with intermittent intervals, as, for example, under David and Solomon, the history of the Jewish people has been full of struggle and suffering. They had to endure the despotism of the neo-Babylonian rulers and the Romans. This social and political suffering was rationalized in terms of a divine mechanism to bring to the outer surface the moral powers and capacity of the chosen Hebraic nation. The concept of suffering contains a millennialistic and a chiliastic element.[4] The rigour of present suffering is only a means to foster moral growth and would eventually lead to the concretization of the kingdom of God on earth. Throughout their history of over three thousand years the Jewish people have stuck to the belief that their suffering would bring them ultimate happiness and thus redeem divine justice. We have analyzed

[1] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 136.
[2] Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, p. 20.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 20.
[4] N. Berdyaev, *The Meaning of History* (London, 1949), pp. 86-107.

the metaphysics of suffering and its political implications in the writings of Aurobindo. In the writings of Gandhi also we find this idea that a satyagrahi has to be ready for all kinds of suffering and tribulation but there is the persistent belief that he would succeed ultimately. In the history of the Indian nationalist movement this idea has been very important. The movement for Indian independence progressed through the suffering of the people. In several movements in history we find that suffering has led to victory.

But apart from its historical substantiation, the important thing to be considered is the mental acceptance of the idea by a vast number of people in India. There are two possible explanations of this phenomenon. First, as a nation, India was terribly weak in her physical resources in comparison to the British. At the time when Aurobindo was leading the movement of Bengal nationalism or when Gandhi was leading the Indian nationalist movement, it was necessary to rationalize suffering not only from the sociological standpoint —that it is a matter of commonplace knowledge that without some sacrifice no gain has ever been accomplished in history—but also from the theological standpoint. Suffering was interpreted as the device by which God was preparing India to take her appointed place in the galaxy of nations.[1] This theological rationalization appealed to the Indian nation and the evidence for this is found in the enthusiasm with which the people hailed the famous statement of Tilak: "It may be the will of providence that the cause which I represent may prosper more by my suffering than by my remaining free."[2] A second explanation is also possible.

[1] Extending the theological meaning of the vicarious atonement of Christ, Nicolas Bardyaev says: "There is no such thing as personality if there is no capacity for suffering. Suffering is inherent in God too, if he is a personality, and not merely an abstract idea. God shares in the sufferings of men. He yearns for responsive love. There are divine as well as human passions and therefore divine or creative personality must always suffer to the end of time. A condition of anguish or distress is inherent in it." (Quoted in *The Advent*, 1948, p. 68). Aurobindo would not accept suffering as an essential attribute of the divine being. But he accepts that suffering is due to a restricted, partial and egoistic consciousness and is a part of the mechanism of the absolute for some cosmic purpose. The fundamental aspect of the delight of the ultimate reality conquers and finally transmutes and transfigures suffering in the image of its all-encompassing divine bliss. According to Berdyaev suffering is ultimately real because it is inherent in God while according to Aurobindo suffering is a local, limited and temporal formation very necessary in the mechanism of terrestrial as well as political evolution but capable of being transmuted into bliss and hence bliss and not suffering is inherent in God.

[2] At the time of Tilak's trial in the Bombay High Court in 1908.

The idea that suffering gives powers to a nation was akin to the old idea of the Vedanta and Yoga that *tapas* was needed for any great work, mundane or spiritual. The Mahabharata contains parables teaching that whenever any political or spiritual hero had to achieve something important he resorted to *tapasya*. The Vedas and the Upanishads contain the metaphysics of *tapas* which is deemed necessary for the purposes of cosmic creation.[1] *Tapas* entails suffering. The classic example of this we find in the history of the Buddha whose inward realizations were born out of a long process of askesis, rigorous austerities, meditation and concentration. Because of its affiliations with the Indian idea that *tapas* is the indispensable factor for great accomplishments, the new statement that suffering gives moral power to the individual and the nation had a wide popular acceptance in the history of the Indian nationalist movement. Aurobindo and Gandhi not only theoretically stated this opinion but in their lives of suffering in the prisons of British India as well as outside the prisons they were living demonstrations of the truth of their statements and therefore the nation accepted their views.

(*c*) *The Theory of Leadership*

The metaphysics of divine determinism, according to Aurobindo, implies the concept of "Godsent leader".[2] All great movements in history require leaders who are voluntary agents for executing the divine will.[3] They are infused with divine energy and force. The notion behind such a conception is that Kali works through these great men. Kali is the dynamic aspect of the absolute being and she is the embodiment of divine force, dynamics and energy. It is not accidental that she works more in one man than in another. A leader is chosen because he has the possibilities of being a willing and powerful channel of the divine force. Once chosen, Kali never rejects him nor allows him to reject her, until the main objective has been realized.[4] In the Bhagavadgita Krishna tells Arjuna that although being overpowered with an egoistic notion the latter might like to

[1] *Rig Veda*, X, 190, 1; X, 109, 4; X, 136. *Atharvaveda*, X, 7, 38; X, 7, 36. *Chhandogya*, 2, 23. *Brihadaranyaka*, 2, 4.
[2] Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, p. 171. [3] *Ibid.*
[4] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 60.

renounce warfare, yet it could not be possible because the great powerful force of Nature would almost forcibly goad and impel him to action. For the success of any movement several types of instruments are needed. Some may be rejected and thrown aside while some are preserved. "This is the greatness of the great man, not that by their own strength they can determine great events but that they are serviceable and specially forged instruments of the Power which determines them."[1] Kali takes possession of them and hence such leaders can achieve results beyond the ordinary criteria of rational calculation, prediction and expectation. Rationality and foreseeable possibility are the human criteria of judgment but since Kali is the divine dynamism acting in the cosmos she can effectuate the impossible. The people commissioned to work out the will and design of the divine manifest signs of superhuman strength and invincible will-power because they are "full of the force of the *Zeitgeist*".[2] The idea that a power beyond man was working within the nationalist movement of Bengal was a matter of deep faith for Aurobindo and in a speech in Bombay in January 1908, he said: ". . . this great nation will rise again and become once more what it was in the days of its spiritual greatness. You are the instruments of God to save the light, to save the spirit of India from lasting obscuration and abasement."[3]

The political concept of the Godsent leader as the divine instrument for effective terrestrial action is a logical implication from the teachings of the Bhagavadgita and the Tantra. Vivekananda honestly believed that due to the blessings and benedictions of his great spiritual teacher Ramakrishna, Kali had entered into him (Vivekananda) and was using him as the instrument for reviving the ancient gospel of the Vedanta.[4] A psychologist or a psycho-analyst or a materialist may debunk this statement as a product of mental hallucination or a chimera or even as a kind of opium to dupe oneself or the people. Christ, Muhammad and Napoleon believed that they were being goaded and guided by a divine power. Moses, St. Paul and Savonarola had such faith. In our days Gandhi believed himself to be a divine instrument for revealing the greatness of

[1] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 60. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 59.
[3] Sri Aurobindo's speech in Bombay, Jan. 1908, *Speeches*, pp. 10-1.
[4] *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. VII, p. 204.

non-violence as a political method by attaining the political salvation of India through it. The honest belief in their being the instruments of a higher power or destiny which transcends the ordinary notions of causality has been a vital force guiding several great leaders. The German Nazi cult of Führer urged that the leader is not chosen by a democratic process but he emerges, like Joan of Arc, at critical epochs, to save the nation from immediate peril. It is very true that there are great differences between the consequences which have followed in imperialistic Fascism on the one hand and the other ethical movements like Christianity or Gandhism or Aurobindism from the acceptance of the idea of a destined or a Godsent leader, but the typology of the sociological claim is similar in both cases because the basic point is the transcendence of normal social causality and the operation of laws and factors which have an appearance of the gigantic and the colossal.

The theory of the Godsent leader as found in Aurobindo has a remarkable similarity to the concept of the world-historical individual in Hegel's philosophy of history. Hegel thinks that whenever there are contingencies of social and historical contradictions, world-historical individuals emerge. Their own particular aims involve those general issues which are the will of the *Welt-Geist*. They derive their impulse and ideology not from the normal pattern of social objectives and duties but from a "concealed fount—one which has not attained to phenomenal present existence—from that inner spirit".[1] These men are heroes. They do not have a conscious cognition of the plans of the general Idea but they think into the requirements of the time. They acquire a great following because what they do and say is commensurate with and oriented to the needs and requirements of the era. "For the Spirit which has taken this fresh step in history is the inmost soul of all individuals; but in a state of unconsciousness which the great men in question aroused. Their fellows, therefore, follow their soul-leaders; for they feel the irresistible power of their own inner Spirit thus embodied."[2] Alexander, Caesar and Napoleon have been such heroes. "When their object is attained they fall off like empty shells from the kernel."[3] The ordinary criteria of ethical distinctions

[1] Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, p. 30. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 30-1. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 31.

are not applicable to these people because they were only unfolding the plan of the spirit. "Moral claims that are irrelevant must not be brought into collision with world-historical deeds and their accomplishment. The litany of private virtue—modesty, humility, philanthropy and forbearance—must not be raised against them. The history of the world might, on principle, entirely ignore the circle within which morality and the so much talked of distinction between the moral and the politic lies."[1] Aurobindo's concept of the Godsent leader is similar to the Hegelian concept of the world-historical heroes because both of them accept that the great men are not autonomous actors but only divine instruments. In one case they are the instruments of Kali, in the case of Hegel they are the instruments for the unfolding of the Idea. In the case of Aurobindo great men are conscious of being the agents of the divine, in Hegel they are unconscious of the purpose of the Idea. Both Hegel and Aurobindo are agreed in stating that the normal code of social ethics is irrelevant to the action of such heroes. Hegel, although a Christian, would not condemn the transgression of the code of morals by Alexander, Caesar or Napoleon. Aurobindo also definitely states that the Avatara or the divine incarnation is not a moral saint.[2] The Avatara descends into the world for establishing some principle relevant for evolutionary progression. That is his main task and he does not care for conforming to the code of social and moral virtues which after all are the creations and constructions of the limited human mind and are relative to spatial and temporal differences.

But since Aurobindo's theory of the Godsent leader is vitally influenced by the concept of the Instrument (*Nimittamatram*) as found in the Gita, there is also a cardinal difference in his notion of the transcendence of morality and that of Hegel. The world-historical individuals of Hegel are great men with colossal force to effectuate mighty social and political changes but they are not gifted with any divine or philosophic gnosis and intuition. They are primarily men with exaggerated and aggrandized vital and physical desires and ambitions. The theory of the instrument in the Gita refers to divine gnosis and a consequent

[1] *Hegel, The Philosophy of History*, p. 67. [2] Sri Aurobindo, *Letters, Second Series*, p. 505

change in the inward temper. According to the Gita, as interpreted by Aurobindo, "the individual soul makes the divinised natural being an instrument of the divine will".[1] The "instrument" of the Gita realizes that from an ultimate standpoint there is an all-pervasive cosmic and trans-cosmic spiritual reality and his inmost being is that same reality. Terrestrial action is being engineered by nature, which is an externalized self-power and agency of the same spirit. Hence the man who wants to realize the divine is advised to transcend the three Gunas or constituent stuff of external nature. A man of such supreme detachment and inner divine consciousness is not affected by the outward actions and events that constitute human history and such a person is not touched or contaminated by evil and sin even if he were to kill the whole army gathered for the battle of Kurukshetra.[2] It is in this philosophical perspective of an ultimate spiritual monism that the Gita formulates its notion of the "instrument". Although from the public standpoint there might be no difference between the physical acts of violence committed by an Alexander or an Arjuna, there is a great difference from the standpoint of their psychological orientation. Alexander kills to satisfy lust and vanity and ambition. Unconsciously, he might be concretizing the process of manifestation of the Idea in world history. Arjuna kills because he thinks that he is serving the purpose of God and is all the time conscious that his inner soul is unaffected by those deeds, because the same Krishna who asks Arjuna to kill the Kauravas also asks him to transcend the operations and mechanical affectations of nature.

But in spite of these subtle metaphysical differences, from the standpoint of political science we can say that both Aurobindo and Hegel are indirectly supporting a kind of Machiavellism whether it be based on grounds of the will of Kali or the service of a higher purpose or the necessary step in the unfoldment of the Idea. There is implied a support of *Machtpolitik*

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita* (Calcutta, 1949), vol. I, p. 290.

[2] *The Bhagavadgita*, XVIII, 17. Commenting on this *shloka*, Aurobindo says: ". . . although the liberated man takes his part in the struggle and though he slays all these peoples, he slays no man and he is not bound by his work, because the work is that of the Master of the Worlds and it is he who has already slain in his hidden omnipotent will all these armies. This work of destruction was needed that humanity might move forward to another creation and a new purpose". *Essays on the Gita*, vol. II, p. 312.

and it may be an indirect invitation to the renunciation of morals in politics. If the acts of treachery and violence resorted to by Krishna and Arjuna, Alexander, Caesar and Napoleon are justified, the theory of the absoluteness of ethical validations and criteria which we find in the Buddha, Christ or Kant is pulverized. It would be absolutely difficult for the normal man to draw the line where egoistic action ceases and divine action or action for the Idea begins. From the standpoint of political philosophy we do not have to create a theodicy trying to justify what has happened in terms of a divine will or idea or an absolute which is supra-ethical, but we should construct a type of idealistic ethics, no matter how greatly the actual conduct of the politicians may diverge from that. We should not rationalize our action by lowering the ideals but aim at persistent and progressive approximation to the ideal.

(*d*) *The Concept of Time in History*

Very closely connected with the concept of the Godsent leader is another concept in Aurobindo's philosophy of history—the theory of the "Spirit of the Time". "In all movements, in every great mass of human action it is the Spirit of the Time, that which Europe calls the *Zeitgeist* and India Kala, who expresses himself."[1] Kali is the great dynamic energy and power "manifesting herself in the perpetual surge of men, institutions and movements".[2] Mahakala is the hidden spirit whose energy is concretized in Kali and which moulds and shapes the history and destiny of nations and peoples. The impetus of the Mahakala fulfils itself in time. When there is an impulsion from the secret reality, time and the divine mother take charge of it and work for its fulfilment.[3] When the spiritual being designs to work in a particular direction, then all the external cosmic forces are organized and harnessed for the successful execution of that. The sole task that becomes imperative is the effective realization of that one single purpose. Really speaking, the help or the resistance of man is irrelevant because if the Time-Spirit is

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 56 [2] *Ibid.*
[3] The "instrumentality of Time" or Kala is a significant force. "... for in all things there is a cycle of their action and a period of the divine movement." *The Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 1.

insistent it would not desist till its purpose has been realized. The *Zeitgeist* is "the stress of the hidden spirit"[1] which expresses itself through the course of history. Historical events are a magnificent panorama of its external manifestation. "This is the *Zeitgeist*, this is the purpose that runs through the process of the centuries, the changes of the suns, this is that which makes evolution possible and provides it with a way, means and goal. 'This is He who from years sempiternal hath ordered perfectly all things'."[2] The transcendent master and governor of the cosmos has its own ways of slow as well as rapid movements[3] and history becomes the record of its manifestations in the course of time.[4]

The concept of the *Zeitgeist* or Kali is related to the metaphysics of time. Time is the great bank of conscious existence turned into values of experience and action.[5] ". . . our surface being is only the deeper eternal Self in us throwing itself out as the adventurer in Time, a gambler and speculator in infinite possibilities, limiting itself to the succession of movements so that it may have all the surprise and delight of the adventure."[6] Time and space are the conceptive self-extension of the spiritual reality. Time itself is real and eternal. There are three statuses in the eternity of the spirit.[7] First, there is the timeless immobile status which is supremely self-concentrated and self-immersed and is without developments of consciousness in movement or eventuation. Secondly, there is the status of simultaneous integrality of time. It is a stable whole-consciousness of the successive historical relations of all manifested things and phenomena. Thirdly, there is the temporal movement of the self-awareness in terms of history effectuating what was seen in the stable vision. Eternity is the common term between time and the timeless spirit. Spirit is spaceless and timeless when it looks at itself in essence and principle of being. Space and time are the same reality self-extended[8] to contain the development of what was within it and hence they are the same spirit looking at itself in the dynamism of its essence and principle. "Space

[1] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 54.
[2] Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 54.
[3] Cf., *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 264: ". . . the rush of the car of the Time-spirit in the extreme velocity of its progress."
[4] *The Human Cycle*, p. 87. [5] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 261.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 262. [7] *Ibid.*, pp. 83-4. [8] *The Life Divine*, vol. I, p. 161.

and Time are our names for this self-extension of the one Reality."[1] Time also has a spiritual character in the sense that it is the subjective self-extension of the spiritual reality for purposes of cosmic manifestation.[2]

According to the ancient Vedantic theory force is inherent in conscious existence and hence Kali or Sakti is not different from the supreme reality. It is the self-determination of the self-awareness of the absolute for purposes of cosmic procession and hence time can be very well called the accessory instrument of Kali for creating history. Since time is the subjective self-extension of the spirit and Kali is the conceptive and dynamic expressive force of the spirit, therefore, when Aurobindo says that Kali or *Zeitgeist* is the force behind history we find that his political and historical thought is an essential implication of his metaphysics. In his search for the inward governing soul and propulsive force of the historical dynamic Aurobindo is akin to the old Vedic and Vedantic tradition. According to the Atharvaveda *Kala* or time is regarded as a cosmic force. In the Rig Veda also we find kindred notions. The creative aspect of time—with the implication of its being not a subjective mental concept or an abstraction for the purposes of intellectual analysis—is strong in the old Indian tradition. The philosophy of the Tantra carried forward this thought and it conceived of a passive Shiva and an active dynamic Kali. Bengal being the great centre of Tantric philosophy and practice we find the idea of the dynamic force of Kali very strongly emphasized in Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Aurobindo and Subhas Bose.

Aurobindo not only refers to the gigantic historical strides effectuated by the rapid march of the Time-Spirit but also calls Sri Krishna the Time-Spirit.[3] The psychological and theological conceptions clustering round the name of Sri Krishna have been very important in recent Indian thought and political practice. To a great portion of the Hindu world Krishna signifies the concrete human incarnation of the power of God. The Hindu mind has strong belief in the coming of

[1] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 79.

[2] An account of Sri Aurobindo's view on space and time from the comparative standpoint (with reference to Kant, Einstein, Russell, Whitehead, etc.) is presented in Haridas Chaudhry, "Space, Time and Eternity", *Sri Aurobindo Mandira Annual* 1950, pp. 36-66.

[3] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 57; *Essays on the Gita*, vol. II, p. 276.

Krishna whenever there is a great social and political crisis. In modern India some people not only compared Krishna and Gandhi but also considered Gandhi to be another Krishna. The divergent sociological roles ascribed to Krishna are important for analyzing the psychological structure of the Hindu mind in a national political perspective in the last seventy to eighty years. Aurobindo does not consider Krishna to be merely a great historical hero. True to his Hindu background he accepts Krishna as an Avatara or incarnation of God. He testifies to his having a vision of Krishna when undergoing unpleasant experiences with the administrative authorities during his confinement as an under-trial prisoner in the Alipore Jail in Calcutta. He says that Krishna placed the Gita in his hands and so deep and overwhelming was the entire psychological experience that everywhere around him he saw only Krishna Vasudeva.[1] This means that in those days he regarded Krishna not only as a divine incarnation but also a benign and beneficent divine being who expresses himself to his human devotees.

In his earlier writings Aurobindo regarded Krishna as an incarnation whose intention was to establish an all-Indian imperial political system.[2] In the Gita and the Mahabharata according to Aurobindo, Krishna wants to preach the gospel of action impelled by the highest gnosis.[3] In the Mahabharata his mission as a political leader was to bring about the unification of India. Jarasandha also wanted the political unity of India but since his schemes were based on oppression and vice Krishna foiled his attempts by managing to get him killed by Bhima. He could have installed the Yadavas to a place of political pre-eminence because of his dynastic affiliations with them, but since this place hereditarily belonged to the Pandavas he installed Yudhisthira in his rightful place. Krishna was opposed to Arjuna's desire for the renunciation of war because it would have frustrated all his (Krishna's) political aims.[4] According to Aurobindo, Krishna's plans for an all-Indian imperialism were to be consummated by the destruction of the

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *Uttarpara speech*, p. 8.

[2] Sri Aurobindo, *Gita Ki Bhumika* (in Hindi), pp. 72-9; "The Political Story of Mahabharata", *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, Seventh Number, pp. 117-9.

[3] Sri Aurobindo, *Gita Ki Bhumika* (in Hindi), p. 7.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 78-9.

Kauravas and the other Kshattriya powers.[1] Arjuna was the divinely appointed instrument and conqueror in the battle for the realization of this vast political aim.[2] Aurobindo thinks that because of the probable chances of social and political chaos if Arjuna desisted from battle, Krishna insisted that he engage in battle. This aspect of Krishna as a political diplomat who wanted India's unity has not been the main feature in his great and powerful role as a messiah which has been principally accepted by the Hindu mind. In the Gita he says that whenever there is the submergence of righteousness and the decline of the moral code he makes his appearance. This is the principal aspect in which he has been accepted. Since the Hindu mind interpreted the struggle between Indian nationalism and British imperialism as a righteous war where the cause of right lay with the former, some people had belief and faith in the re-appearance of Krishna.

According to Aurobindo, Krishna, who is the divine incarnation par excellence[3] and who has descended into the world for making permanent the force of the global overmental consciousness[4] on earth is the *Zeitgeist*. The famous World-Form or *Visvarupa* of Krishna as described in the Bhagavadgita, according to Aurobindo, is not a fiction or a metaphor but a truth of the higher and subtler planes of existence. The political and historical conclusions following from this concept of the *Zeitgeist* are stated by Aurobindo. "All have been moving inevitably towards the catastrophe of Kurukshetra. Men did not know it; those who would have done everything possible to avert the calamity, helped its coming by their action or inaction; those who had a glimpse of it strove in vain to stop the wheels of Fate; . . . but the *Zeitgeist* overbore all. . . . Who could resist the purpose of the *Zeitgeist*? There were strong men and Yogins, subtle statesmen, leaders of men, kings of thought and action,

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *Gita Ki Bhumika* (in Hindi), p. 78.

[2] According to *The Yoga and its Objects*, p. 16, Arjuna was opposing some personal idea of altruism, justice or virtue against the surrender of our will that God demands of us.

[3] Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita*, Chap. 2.

[4] Sri Aurobindo, *Letters, Second Series*, p. 493. The overmind is a principle of global knowledge. The descent of the overmind leads to the entire subordination of the ego-sense and its replacement by a large cosmic perfection. It is the highest possible status-dynamism of the spirit in the spiritual mind plane. Beyond the overmind are the planes of the supermind and the Sachchidananda.

the efflorescence of a mighty intellectual civilization at its height. A little turning to the right instead of to the left on the part of a few of these would, it might seem, have averted the whole catastrophe . . . (But) the *Zeitgeist* proclaims the utter helplessness of the mightiest and the sure fulfilment of God's decree."[1] This immanent working of the *Zeitgeist* is true of all historical phenomena and applies to the cosmic creation, preservation and destruction.

This notion of the working of the *Zeitgeist* with a colossal inevitability and power necessarily repudiates the theory of creative political and social leadership. The historical leader is not a man of great independent strength who can achieve mighty results through his own efforts. He is only an instrument of God. Thus Aurobindo's theory is different from Carlyle's hero theory. Aurobindo believes that the hero derives his heroism from the strength and energy of God. Hence "the greatness of individuals is the greatness of the eternal Energy within".[2]

(e) *The Spiritual Interpretation of the French Revolution*

The concrete political illustration of the theory of divine determinism in history is provided by Aurobindo in his view that the French Revolution and the movement of Bengal nationalism were the manifestations of a spiritual will. The French Revolution was directed by the will of God. So long as Mirabeau worked for the revolution he fared well but when he turned against the revolution Kali put her foot on Mirabeau and he disappeared. In spite of his absence the revolution marched on because "the Revolution was the manifestation of the *Zeitgeist*, the Revolution was the will of God".[3] Aurobindo substantiates his views about the revolution being in the divine plan by analyzing the principal contributions it made to Europe.[4] First, it generated and strengthened the feelings of national self-consciousness in the European countries. Henceforward demands for self-government on the basis of nationalism

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, pp. 57-9.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 61. [3] *Ibid.*, pp. 60-1.
[4] Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity* (Sri Aurobindo Ashrama, Pondichery, 1950. Second edition), p. 83.

began to be made in several countries. Secondly, it sponsored the movement toward the application of critical reason to political problems and freedom became the battle-cry in all the social and political movements that succeeded the French Revolution. Thirdly, although the revolution was not socialistic and equalitarian, being primarily a bourgeois movement, yet a certain amount of social equality and justice, indispensable to political liberty, was henceforward demanded.[1]

With regard to the role of the principal figures in the drama of the revolution it could be said that Mirabeau initiated, Danton inspired, Robespierre slew and Napoleon fulfilled.[2] Mirabeau was the dominant figure in an era of transition. He was neither a liberal nor a conservative, but was egoistic. He was attached to justice and liberty, but only to the extent that they served his purpose. "Had his career been fortunate, the forms of the old regime wide enough to satisfy his ambitions and passions, the upheaval of 1789 might have found him on the other side. But because the heart and senses of Mirabeau were unsatisfied, the French Revolution triumphed."[3] Mirabeau helped in creating the revolution and to that extent he was acting in consonance with the design of God. But he was hurled down by Kali, the *Zeitgeist*, the moment he became a supporter of the ideals of the *ancien regime* and wanted to resist the forward march of the revolution.[4] This downfall of Mirabeau indicates that the great man is great only to the extent that he cognizes the will of the Time-Spirit and consents to be its agent and instrument but if he is seized by egoism and passion the Time-Spirit would repudiate and even crush him and have another agent.

Danton was a centre of action for some years in the revolution. He was the character of the revolution personified.[5] He was the heart of the revolution if Robespierre was its hand. Distinguished from Mirabeau, Danton lacked personal ambition. His exit removed the destructive and aggressive aspect of the revolution. Robespierre personified faith. He was the

[1] According to Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita* (American edition), pp. 150-1 the French Revolution brought about a mental and dynamic modification of the general consciousness on the political plane.

[2] "Historical Impressions", *Sri Aurobindo Mandira Annual*, No. 8, 1949, p. 164.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 164-5.

[4] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 60.

[5] "Historical Impressions", *op. cit.*, pp. 165-6.

supreme idealist.[1] He could not stop when he began to slay. He would not listen to Danton. "Danton died because he resisted the hand of Kali, but his mighty disembodied body triumphed and imposed his last thought on the country. The Terror ceased, mercy took its place. Robespierre, however, has his place of honour in history; he was the man of conscience and principle."[2]

Napoleon also was the agent of God but he too was later rejected by Kali because of his exaggerated ambitions. He was the arch-individualist, self-centred and trying to satisfy his own vanities and ambitions. He was never an altruist. He used others only as means for serving his own purposes. He was the Rakshasa. But even the Rakshasa is necessary as a dialectical element of antithesis in history. The Rakshasa typifies force and individual capacity. He "is the second power of God, wrath, strength, grandeur, rushing impetuosity, overbearing courage, the avalanche, the thunderbolt; he is Balaram, he is Jehovah, he is Rudra".[3] When Napoleon began to assert his own pretentious designs to personal sovereignty he was destroyed by Kali because she had to perfect the principle of nationality. The misuse of divine force always leads to the destruction of the people who make such attempts. Napoleon was destroyed by Kali because although he attempted to prepare the foundations for the future and destroyed the encumbrances of the old regime, he misused the present. His enemies who formed the four coalitions against him saved the gains for the present from his ruthless destroying hands. For doing this work "England, Germany and Russia had a great immediate development and the possession of the nienteenth century".[4] Napoleon had to face troubles because he refused to quit the stage of history even after his work was done. To this extent he was different from Garibaldi and akin to Mazzini.[5]

But despite his shortcomings, even in his failure Napoleon served God. Sometimes Napoleon's foreign policy is considered a failure because he left France narrower in geographical

[1] According to Mathiez, Robespierre (1758-1794) was a realistic statesman devoted to the concept of justice. Albert Mathiez, *La Revolution Francaise* (Paris, 1927-28), 3 vols.

[2] "Historical Impressions", *op. cit.*, pp. 166-7.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 167-9.

[4] "Historical Impressions", *op. cit.*, p. 170

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 164.

territory. "But it was not Napoleon's mission to aggrandize France geographically. He did not come for France but for humanity, and even in his failure he served God and prepared for the future."[1] He roused the sentiments of nationalism in Germany, France and Poland. But he also established the tendency towards the formation of great political empires and the immediate future lay in the harmonized fulfilment of nationality and empire.[2]

The French Revolution and the exploits of Napoleon occupy a great place in European and world history.[3] Aurobindo traces the ultimate roots of the basic ideas of the French Revolution to the sentiments of fraternity popularized by Buddhism and Christianity. The ideological weakness of the revolution was that it made liberty central and fraternity secondary. Buddhism and Christianity had such a tremendous following because they had made fraternity so important a part of their gospel. But instead of putting the primary emphasis on the Asiatic principle of fraternity, the revolution made the Graeco-Roman principle of liberty the basis.[4] But although Aurobindo accepts the limitations of the revolution in that a large part of its work was chiefly destructive he is emphatic in his views that it was in the plan of the *Zeitgeist*. He considers the action of the French Revolution to be the death-dance of Kali. Kali called to her help two powerful forces. She had *Yatudhani*, the power of destruction, by her side. She also solicited the aid of *Rakshasi* —the unbridled licentious power of self-assertion of the ego which relentlessly throws aside all opponents. Kali did her work

[1] "Historical Impressions", *op. cit.*, p. 170

[2] Cf. T. H. Green, *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation*, section 128: "The most conspicuous modern instance of a man who was instrumental in working great and in some ways beneficial changes in the political order of Europe, from what we should be apt to call the most purely selfish motives, is Napoleon.. The aggrandisement of France, in which Napoleon's passion for glory satisfied itself, had to take at least the semblance of a deliverance of oppressed peoples, and in taking the semblance it to a great extent performed the reality, at any rate in western Germany and northern Italy, wherever the Code Napoleon was introduced."

[3] According to Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 208: "The rule of the Jacobins and the regime of Napoleon only brought rapidly to fruition what was slowly evolving under the monarchy out of the confused organism of feudal France." De Tocqueville also upheld a similar view of the work of centralization done by the French Revolution.

[4] "Historical Impressions", *op cit.*, p. 163; *Dharma Aur Jatiyata* (Hindi translation by Deva Narayan Dwivedi, Banaras, 1934. Third Edition), pp. 120-1.

with these two terrible weapons—Yatudhani and Rakshasi. These latter sent their cry over Europe and added a warning to the Europeans: liberty, equality and fraternity, or death. "Death to all those who oppose God's evolution."[1]

This type of theological explanation of the French Revolution follows from Aurobindo's metaphysics which accepts the central truth of the spiritual absolute. St. Augustine offers such a theological explanation of the fall of the Roman empire. Dante defends his advocacy of a powerful unifying Roman empire on Christian theological grounds. Toynbee holds the view that the uniqueness of the western European civilization, which distinguishes it from the other twenty civilizations that have either flourished in the past or are present in the world, lies in its acceptance of Christianity and it is this that has imparted to it a power for survival. Such theological explanations of history and politics have been known in the history of thought. To the extent that Aurobindo emphasizes the liberating role of the French Revolution in having made the gospels of nationalism and democracy the central guiding themes in nineteenth century politics, he is correct from the standpoint of political history.

(*f*) *The Spiritual Interpretation of Indian Nationalism*

Aurobindo illustrates his theory of divine determinism in history also with reference to the Indian nationalist movement. The partition of Bengal provided the opportunity for the development of an exalted nationalism in India. "Nationalism is immortal, nationalism cannot die because it is no human thing, it is God who is working in Bengal. God cannot be killed, God cannot be sent to jail."[2] Aurobindo considers God or Atman to be the leader of the movement[3] and hence in his speeches he advocates a return to the spirit and the realization of its plans and dictates. If the voice of the spirit could be rightly listened to and apprehended there could always be found people who would act according to the commands of a God-inspired leader.

If the nationalist movement was in the divine plan, the British invasion of India was also, according to Aurobindo,

[1] "Historical Impressions", *op. cit.*, p. 164.
[2] Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, pp. 8-9. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 32.

a part of the spiritual mechanism because the former was only the antithesis of the latter. In the eighteenth century the country was full of traitors, self-seekers and powerful men. It was the reign of *Tamas.*[1] The time and the environment were ready for the country to become politically dependent. At that period the British appeared on the scene to effectuate the inscrutable design of providence.[2] The cruel and inhuman repressions perpetrated by British imperialism were also a part of the divine plan. "Repression is nothing but the hammer of God that is beating us into shape so that we may be moulded into a mighty nation and an instrument for his work in the world."[3] The principal aim of the divine behind British imperialism was the effectuation of India's unification, a task which Aurobindo considers the central trend in the history of India for the last two thousand years.

Being a mystic who reads the will of God in history, he interprets all the principal events in the course of the Bengal nationalist movement as well as the movement of Indian nationalism as designed and willed by God. He considers the historic breach in the two sections of the Congress at Surat in 1907 also to be a part of the divine will in action.[4] Tilak's deportation to Mandalay in Burma was also the will of God. "It is He, not any other, who has taken them and his ways are not the ways of men, for he is all-wise."[5] Since the real leader of the movement was not Tilak or Ashwini Kumar Datta, however great they might be, but God himself, his will had to be accepted.

This theory of divine determinism in history and the notion of the ultimate leadership of political movements by God is a cardinal belief of the Hindu philosophical mind. In the Mahabharata and the Puranas there are stories illustrating providential interventions in the course of history. In the Gita it is stated that wherever there is anyting great and colossal in human and cosmic history that is to be considered as a manifestation of the divine. The Vedas contain the classic story of the fight between Indra and Vrtra where the king of the gods is solicited to kill a great destructive demon. Thus Aurobindo's theory of divine

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 88. [2] *Ibid.* [3] Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, p. 100.
[4] Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, pp. 39-40. [5] *Ibid.*, pp. 100-1.

determinism is only a restatement of a vital Hindu theological creed. The difference however is that he incorporates some illustrations from the history of Europe to substantiate his point of view. Such a divine and providential historical interpretation was suited to the sociology of the time because it not only provided a rationalization of much that would have appeared otherwise as terrible, cruel and frustrating but it also gave the people as well as the leaders of the movement great consolation and a tremendous optimism regarding inevitable future success.

The theory of divine determinism in history which in some form is found in the Vedic ideas about Indra and Varuna and in the Mahabharata and the Puranas has been very strong both in Gandhi and Aurobindo; but, perhaps, it is stronger in the latter. Gandhi accepted that God was helping India and he also believed that he himself was only an instrument for revealing the superiority of non-violence as a technique for political independence. But he always considers that God was only a helper. Aurobindo being more influenced by the monistic side of Vedanta conceived of God not only as an aid to the weak and the molested but, in his universal aspect, as identical with the totality of cosmic manifestation. The world is the body and habitation of Brahman and everything is moving according to the supreme consciousness and will of the ultimate being. Thus Aurobindo refers to God as not only the leader in the Bengal nationalist movement but also as the worker and the work. ". . . and if those who seem to stand in the front or to be absolutely indispensable are called upon to throw their bodies away, we shall then know that that also is wanted, that this is a work God has asked us to do, and that in the place of those who are thrown away, God will bring many more. He himself is behind us. He himself is the worker and the work. He is immortal in the hearts of the people."[1] This kind of supreme theological determinism applied to history we do not find in medieval scholasticism or German idealism. It is a kind of majestic faith deriving from the Gita's idea of God being behind historical movements and guiding men's motives and action according to his predetermined plans and the Samkhya idea that man does not really do anything, nature being the real

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, p. 25.

agent. It is almost a literal application to politics of the great Vedantic saying that "all this is the Brahman". Hence Aurobindo's saying that God is both the worker and the work in Bengal nationalism has its roots in the ancient Hindu metaphysics.

(g) The Theory of "The Chosen People"

An implication from the spiritual interpretation of history is the concept of the "chosen people". God resides in the heart of the people and wants them to have belief and faith. "Because of this capacity of belief we were chosen as the people who were to save India",[1] the people who were to suffer for the nation in the firm hope that they were suffering for a divine cause. "Such a people need not be politically strong, it need not be a people sound in physique, it need not be a people of the highest intellectual standing. It must be a people who can believe."[2] The sentiment of firm belief and faith in the providence of God which is an important element in Hindu theology and philosophy since the formulation of the concept of *Sraddha* in the Rig Veda and the Upanishads, and which has been considered as a *sine qua non* of spiritual realization, is being referred to by Aurobindo as a political technique. Aurobindo stresses the religious inspiration behind Bengal nationalism and refers to the examples of Ramakrishna and Bipin Pal (who was influenced by a mendicant). He states that the people who started the *Bande Mataram* and the person who organized the National College in Calcutta were influenced by religious teachers.[3] Since the inspiration behind the movement was religious it required a capacity for religious belief and faith in the justness of the cause and an ungrudging readiness to make sacrifice. Since God was the master and the teacher it was only logical that He would give to "His chosen nation"[4] a faultless training and a supreme capacity to effectuate the great task ahead.[5]

Aurobindo accepts that the Biblical idea of the Chosen People is similar to the ideas he was preaching. According to the Bible, due to their persecution the cult of Jehovah was being forsaken by the Jewish people who were turning to foreign

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, pp. 12-3. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 12-3, p. 102.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 12. [4] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 17. [5] *Ibid.*

idols and even the chief prophet of the faith felt bewildered. "God called him to go forth and strive with the priests of Baal. 'Always,' He said, 'in the nation I have chosen there are some who confess me and now too in this nation there are seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.' So also in the Bengal which God has chosen there would always be several thousands, who would never bow the knee to false gods."[1] It did not matter if some people who proclaimed the gospel of nationalism were imprisoned, others would follow and still others and there would be always some who would not hesitate to give up their all for the sake of the great Mother who was revealing herself in the movement and whose children they were.

The concept of the chosen people has played a very important role in the historical dialectic of the Jewish people. The Jews have always believed in being the people of God and this has determined both their psychological orientation and their concrete historical action. "Before its God has been recognised as the unique God, Creator of the universe and the Lord of all, He had been the God of the race, a national deity. This association of the monotheistic idea with the national destiny of God's chosen people was the factor that determined all the peculiarities and the specific characteristics of the religious destiny of the Jews."[2] Despite a long record of discrimination, persecution and suffering the Jews have not given up this idea and have always accepted the eschatological notion of the ultimate victory of divine truth and justice. The notion of the chosen people has had two sociological implications. First,it made the Jews an intensely self-conscious people, a group apart with a unique historical destiny. Secondly, it imparted a very vital and vigorous religious orientation to the entire social and political history of the Jews. The ordinary distinction between politics and religion did not obtain among them and they accepted the idea of a theocracy.

In India the theory of the chosen people never had a great fascination. The basic notions of the Vedanta which have to a large extent determined the sociological and psychological ideas and character of the Hindus were antithetical to such a

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, pp. 166-7.
[2] N. Berdyaev, *The Meaning of History*, p. 90.

view. According to the Vedanta, in his inmost essence man is the same spiritual reality as God. The transcendental difference between God and man which was accepted in the Jewish theology made the idea of a supreme and constant favour by God upon men essential. Moreover, the Jews have always been a numerically small group and therefore their national and social cohesiveness has been strong. On the other hand, among the Hindus localism and separatism have been strong and the sentiments and attributes that characterize a closed group have never attained any great importance. In some leaders of Indian nationalism the notion of spiritual messianism has been strong. Dayananda, Vivekananda, Gandhi and Aurobindo believed that India has a religious mission and message for the world but the notion of the chosen people did not get any large response. The references made to this idea by Aurobindo have not been politically important. Under the influence and inspiration of the great leaders and teachers of the Indian Renaissance a large body of Indian intellectuals has accepted the idea that India has a mission to save the world from the dark and tenebrous abyss of materialism, violence and destruction but it has never held the idea of being "chosen" by God for this task. In the ancient Israelite religion there were religious cults to symbolize the process of being chosen and these have been absent in the Indian tradition.

(*h*) *The Role of Asuric Forces in History*

Although from the ultimate standpoint Aurobindo accepts a thorough divine determinism in history, he accounts for the unregenerate character of human history by reference to the predominance of the powers of darkness. There has been much falsehood, death and suffering in the world because the forces of evil have not been conquered. "In Nature, since it started from division and egoism, the Titan had to come first, he is here in us as the elder god, the first ruler of man's heaven and earth. Then arrives the God and delivers and harmonises."[1] Aurobindo accepts the forces of darkness to be a reality which can be seen in some subtle forms of supra-physical experience. They

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *The Superman* (Arya Publishing House, Calcutta, 1944), p. 7.

are not referred to only for analogy or for metaphor. In the process of the cosmic manifestation there has been the creation of several worlds. The worlds of the Asuras and the mental, vital or subtle physical Devas are prior to the evolution. Since Aurobindo accepts the reality of supra-physical beings[1] he accepts that the Vedic and the Zoroastrian references to the forces of darkness do not relate to symbols but refer to concrete beings whose existence can be verified in subliminal inner experience. There are several planes of the forces of darkness. The Asuras are beings of the mentalised vital, the Rakshasas belong to the middle vital and the Pisachas to the lower vital.[2] These forces of darkness are hostile to a divine transmutation of ignorance and inconscience and hence they create confusions.[3] But even these beings also ultimately serve the purpose of the divine in the process of history. Since the eventual aim of cosmic manifestation is supramental harmonization and transformation it is essential that a full lease of life be given to these dark forces of ignorance and inconscience so that their possibilities may be all exhausted and a final higher integration based on spiritual realization may be consummated.[4]

Referring to the political turmoils of Europe in 1937 Aurobindo stated that he did not regard them as a fight between the powers of light and the powers of darkness. "It is a fight between two kinds of ignorance."[5] He added that his own aim was the descent on earth of the supramental truth which had self-subsistent power of existence and did "not depend upon the victory of one or other of the forces of the Ignorance. That is the reason why we are not to mix in political and social controversies and struggles".[6]

But the second World War was interpreted by Aurobindo as a battle between the forces of evil and good.[7] He considered

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, vol. II, pp. 376-8; *The Significance of Indian Art*, p. 48.
[2] Sri Aurobindo, *Letters, Second Series*, p. 179; *Letters, First Series*, p. 37; for the reference to Daityas and other hostile beings in the intermediate zones, *The Riddle of This World*, p. 56.
[3] Sri Aurobindo, *More Lights on Yoga*, p. 13; Sri Aurobindo's message on World War II on July 4, 1940, *Messages of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother* (Second Series, Pondichery, 1952), p. 1.
[4] Sri Aurobindo, *More Lights on Yoga*, p. 13.
[5] Sri Aurobindo, *Letters, Fourth Series*, pp. 58-9.
[6] *Ibid.*
[7] *Messages of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother* (Second Series, Pondichery 1952), p. 12: "We made it plain in a letter which has been made public that we did not consider

that there was great danger to human civilization from the barbaric and aggressive pretensions and designs of Hitlerite Germany[1] and hence perhaps he not only financially contributed to the war fund raised on behalf of the Allies but his disciples sincerely believed that he also had used his esoteric and spiritual force to bring about the defeat of the Axis powers.[2]

Thus we find that the idea of the duel between the forces of good and evil which appears in the Rig Veda, the Brahmanas, the Buddhist scriptures, the Puranas and in the traditions of Zoroastrianism and Manicheanism is re-formulated and re-asserted in this esoteric interpretation of the World War as given by Aurobindo. Since in the days of the second World War the Indian National Congress and the great body of the Indian intellectuals were opposed to war efforts in India because of the reluctance of the British leaders to part with power, Aurobindo's theological interpretation of the war did not get any sympathetic response in India and Indian nationalists were bitterly critical of his possible financial contributions to the war fund. They felt that Aurobindo was not helping but hindering the cause of Indian independence thereby.

The prevalence and even the occasional predominance of the dark Asuric forces, however, does not deny the chances of the ultimate emergence of good.[3] Good and evil are mechanisms in the divine dialectic. God prepares both the man and the moment. "Without the man the moment is a lost opportunity; without the moment the man is a force inoperative. The meeting of the two changes the destiny of nations and the poise of the

the war as a fight between nations and governments (still less between good people and bad people) but between two forces, the Divine and the Asuric. . . . The victory of one side (the Allies) would keep the path open for the evolutionary forces: the victory of the other side would drag back humanity, degrade it horribly and might lead even, at the worst, to its eventual failure as a race, as others in the past evolution failed and perished." Referring to the fact that the victory of the Allies would lead to the creation of a chance for the growth of the divine work, Aurobindo wrote: "Those who fight for this cause are fighting for the Divine and against the threatened reign of the Asura." *Ibid.*, p. 9.

[1] *Messages of Sri Aurobindo* and *the Mother* (Second Series), p. 2. In a poem entitled "The Dwarf Napoleon", Sri Aurobindo condemned Hitler as "a sentimental egoist poor and rough", as being an "intense neurotic" and a man whose nature was made of iron and mud, with "a will to trample humanity into clay and unify earth beneath one iron sway". He apprehended that the triumph of Hitlerism would "prepare the dismal hour" of the supremacy of inconscience.

[2] S. Mitra, *The Liberator* (Bombay, 1954), pp. 182-3.

[3] *More Lights on Yoga*, pp. 7-8.

world is altered by what seems to the superficial an accident."[1] Thus we find that Aurobindo's philosophy of history is sharply distinguished from that of Marx and Engels. Engels says: "That such and such a man and precisely that man appears at a particular time in that country is, of course, pure accident. But cut him out and there will be a demand for a substitute, and this substitute will be found, good or bad, but in the long run he will be found. . . if a Napoleon had been lacking, another would have filled the place, is proved by the fact that the man has always been found as soon as he becomes necessary, Caesar, Augustus, Cromwell etc."[2] Marxism accepts the predominant role of the forces of production and the relations of production based upon them. Carlyle accepts the pre-eminence of the hero and this theory is also accepted by the Fascists and the Nazis. On the other hand, we find that according to Aurobindo both the man and the situational forces are necessary factors in historical causation and both are prepared by the divine. The gods take care of human destiny and they prepare the forces accordingly; the fate of mankind is being guided by the power of divine beneficence. Sometimes it may appear that a cause dear to God, as for instance the Bengal nationalist movement, may be opposed by certain sections of people. But actually the latter are serving the will of God and are not really, but only apparently, opposing that. They are also the helping instruments of God. Hence, although the passion-driven sceptical mind may be frustrated and may despair of the victory of good, to the illumined eye of the seer, who has been delivered from the chains of egoistic dualities, everything, even evil, will appear as finally leading to good because God is all-wise and beneficent. Good and evil are the two elements in the spiritual dialectic and through them cosmic procession is being impelled. This spiritual dialectic not only characterizes historical movements but even the theological pattern is similarly conceived. In Christianity and Vaishnavism God is only conceived as a kind power who showers blessings and goodness. In the broad current of the historical development of Hinduism, on the other hand, God is

[1] Sri Aurobindo, "Historical Impressions", *Sri Aurobindo Mandira Annual*, 1949, p. 165.

[2] Engel's letter to Heinz Starkenburg, *Selected Works of Marx* (New York edition), vol. I, pp. 392-3.

conceived not only as the creator and preserver of the cosmos but also its destroyer. Thus there is the manifestation of both the beneficent and the malevolent phases of divine action. Hence both in history and in theology there is a dialectic. But from the ultimate standpoint good will eventually triumph because evil and darkness will first be conquered and then transmuted into the form of the all-delight of the supreme supernal being.[1]

4. PHILOSOPHY OF INDIAN HISTORY

(a) *Spiritual and Intellectual Foundations of Indian History*

Aurobindo has made some attempts to apply his spiritual philosophy of history to explain the developments of India and Europe. His main thesis is that since the spirit is the supreme reality, only those nations that stick to it survive in the long run. He believes in the ultimate renaissance of India and the emergence of the East to a position of pre-eminence in the world. He constructs a scheme which seeks to periodize Indian historical evolution.[2] The Vedas and the Upanishads mark the first or the spiritual age when inspiration, intuition, realization and revelation were regarded as the ways to gnosis.[3] The second was the age of Dharma which came after that. It was an era of intellectual metaphysics and logical reason characterized by the emergence of the ethical world-gospel of the Buddha and the keen dialectical systems of Indian philosophical thought. Throughout, it is marked by a dynamic will and a thoroughgoing emphasis on intellect. Then came the third age — the age of the Puranas, the Tantras and the rise of the Bhakti cult and Vaishnavism. It was not a period of original creative achievement but was a synthetic age when the aesthetic, the emotional, the vital, and the sensuous aspects of man's existence were taken up and used for serving the purpose of spiritual transformation.[4]

[1] *Dharma Aur Jatiyata* (in Hindi), p. 80; *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 42.

[2] Sri Aurobindo, *The Renaissance In India*, p. 16.

[3] Sri Aurobindo, *The Future Poetry* (Pondichery, 1953), pp. 345-6: "One might almost say that ancient India was created by the Veda and Upanishads and the visions of inspired seers made a people."

[4] *The Riddle of This World*, p. 5: The Vaishnava and the Tantra Yogas tried to find the secret of transformation and were sometimes on the verge of success. Sri

Spengler talks of the prime symbols of different cultures, and interpreting Aurobindo's thought in Spenglerian terms we can say that according to Aurobindo spirit is the essential and focal theme in Hindu culture. The concept of the physical infinite as space dominates the Faustian soul of the Western culture, according to Spengler, and in the same way it could be said that there is a dominant notion of the spiritual transcendental infinite in the Hindu culture. The sociological implication from the conception of the spirit as the ultimate reality has been the stress in Indian and Eastern culture[1] on the sentiments of solidarity, unity and mutuality of all beings in the spirit. According to Aurobindo the ideal of altruistic fraternity was first preached by Buddhism in Asia and Egypt and was later taken up by Christianity. The ideal of Western science, on the other hand, is an economic and social formula[2] leading to the creation of a rationalized scientific civilization resorting to the ethics of hedonism and utilitarianism or at best sociological relativism. But the ideals of a mentalized and moralized humanitarianism and a social ethicism which are also being proclaimed by the Western nations indicate that the old Eastern ideal has penetrated into the modern Western ideology.

Spirit was the supreme goal of the architects and builders of Indian civilization. The efflorescence of the creativism of Indian civilization was marked, no doubt, by a tremendous intellectual outburst and a plethoric vitalistic splendour manifested in arts and crafts, industry and commerce, politics and diplomacy. But the spiritual aspect was always emphasized in Indian culture. Even the external manifestations of creativism bear a spiritual meaning. On the other hand, Athens does not reveal the soul of the Greek civilization. In Cairo one does not get the deeper nation-soul that built old Pharaonic Memphis. Rome, in spite of the vaunted *Pax Romana* could only impose an external cultural unity on the races around the Mediterranean and hence the eastern part of the Empire broke from the western part and no lasting impression of Roman power and culture could be made on the African peoples. Due to the want of a unified culture the Latin western nations offered no resistance

Aurobindo, *Letters, Second Series*, p. 317: Vaishnavism and Tantricism combined asceticism with some sublimation of the vital impulse.

[1] *The Life Divine* (American edition), pp. 931-2.

[2] *Ibid.*

to the Teutonic barbarians "and had to be reborn by the infusion of a foreign vitality to become modern Italy, Spain and France".[1] Whereas modern Greece and modern Egypt have lost the vital connexions with the older civilizations that flourished in these areas, in India there is a spiritual link and continuity with the most ancient Vedic traditions which emphasized the realization of the values of freedom, bliss and immortality. Because of the inexhaustible resources of the spirit the soul of India was not crushed in spite of the ravages of numerous foreign hordes and invaders. The surpassing vitality of Indian civilization has been based on the bedrock of the power of spiritual assimilation and creativism.[2] Since prehistoric times spirituality has been dominant and has shaped the whole later trend of Indian society and culture and "made Indian civilisation a thing apart and of its own kind in the history of the human race".[3] Whenever there have been critical and catastrophic periods in India, the spirit has always saved her and the great resurgence visible in India since the nineteenth century has been the consequence of a dynamic spiritual reaction to the mechanical and secularistic impact of the Western civilization strong in its imperialism, materialism and rationalistic science.

The spiritual factor has been predominant not only in the history of India but, according to Aurobindo, is also behind the survival of the Asiatic civilizations as such. The Eastern civilizations have held up the ideal of a kingdom of God and hence have accepted the rule of the spirit over mind and life and body. It is true that the East revealed a great bankruptcy of life and political vigour when faced with the West, "but the success, speciously complete but only for a time, has always turned into a catastrophe".[4] The failure of Asia resulted not because she followed the spirit but because she did not follow the spirit sufficiently.[5] Spirit is the supreme dynamic power of activism and creativism and the pursuit of the ideals of the spirit can never be a factor of weakness in social and political life. Asia turned to the spirit but she created a gulf between spirit and life, between spirit and matter. She did not practise the art of the

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *The Spirit and Form of Indian Polity* (Calcutta, 1947), pp. 70-2.
[2] *The Human Cycle*, p. 233; *The Renaissance in India*, pp. 6-7.
[3] *The Human Cycle*, p. 233.
[4] *Ibid.* pp. 297-8. [5] *Ibid.*

dynamic and wholesome transmutation of matter into spirit. She did not thoroughly pursue the attempt of bringing in large spiritual powers for adding fullness of being to the material and political spheres.[1] Hence an isolation and a divorce was created between spiritual life and political existence and it was perilous. Asia failed because she could not utilize matter and life for realizing the reign of God on earth. Moreover, India and Asia forgot that the spirit is a consciousness-force full of infinite possibilities of manifestation of its being and dynamics. There can be no specific and rigid pattern through which alone the spirit could be realized in social and political practice. The Asiatic cultures, on the other hand, became marked with an undue orthodoxy, conventionalism and dogmatism and believed that a social and moral code could be built up for all times. Hence religious and moral superstitions arose and fresh and original experimentations were forbidden. The cause of the "arrested development and decline"[2] of India and Asia is to be found in the subjection of the higher principles to the lower and in the narrow attempt to bind down and chain the "self-disclosing spirit to a provisional and imperfect compromise with mind and vital nature".[3]

The explanation of the decline of Asia is a great theme for philosophers of history. According to Hegel the Asiatic civilizations of India and China failed because they could not conceive of the spirit as freedom.[4] Marx explains the backwardness of Asia by the continued prevalence of the old economic features of a communal economy.[5] Spengler points out that the Asiatic civilizations had their glorious days in history. They had their creative periods in earlier eras but the only civilization that is living today is the West-European-American civilization infused with a Faustian spirit of adventure.[6] Gobineau, Hans Günther and Alfred Rosenberg would stress the racial inferiority and weakness of the Asiatic peoples as contrasted to the superior physical and intellectual power of the Nordic peoples. Berdyaev attributes the ahistoricity and insignificance of the Indian peoples on the stage of history to

[1] *The Human Cycle*, p. 295-8. [2] *Ibid.* p. 303. [3] *Ibid.*
[4] Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, pp. 104-5, p. 18.
[5] Karl Marx, *Articles on India*; *Selected Works of Karl Marx*, vol. II, pp. 655-6.
[6] Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, vol. I, p. 3.

their metaphysical and speculative temper which is not consonant with the passionate drama and dynamic intensity of the historical dialectic.[1] All these explanations and hypotheses are partial and may explain some specific segment of the historical texture. The temper of modern historical scholarship is to beware of large generalizations of a monistic character which want to explain the totality of historical phenomena with reference to the ubiquitous all-powerful one single factor. Aurobindo also singles out one factor—the spiritual, and this type of monistic explanation runs counter to the now generally held view that the adequate revelation of the patterns of historical causation requires a hypothesis which accepts the interdependence of multiple categories.

Moreover, Aurobindo does not seem to be quite accurate factually in stating that Asia failed, because she did not follow the spirit sufficiently. Perhaps he is generalizing on the basis of the philosophical systems of the monistic Vedanta and the Buddhist subjectivism and nihilism. These systems were undoubtedly acosmic in their temper but the same cannot be said of the Carvakas, the Mimansakas and the Naiyayikas who affirmed the existence and values of this world. The Chinese ethical, political and humanistic philosophies never knew of a gulf between spirit and matter. Modern researches into the psychological structure of peoples show that in many aspects of individual and social life the Chinese are more akin to the Western peoples than to the Indian. Hence any generalization touching the entire East has to be made on the basis of vast historical data and even then it is doubtful whether it could stand the test of empirical inductive historical scholarship. There could be no valid statement at all about the Mongols having not followed the spirit sufficiently and hence having fallen. The military exploits of the Mongols betray the same ruthlessness and relentlessness that could characterize any comparable epoch in European history. It is highly problematic as to what extent Aurobindo's generalizations about the spiritual factor being responsible for the continued existence of Asia would apply to Islam. Wherever Islam succeeded in history it was primarily by resort to force and when she met the

[1] N. Berdyaev, *The Meaning of History,* pp. 31, 87, 111.

superior mechanized forces of the scientific West she lay prostrate. The Islamic peoples and the Mongols did achieve great political successes for some centuries and were a great menace to the security of the European civilization, but Aurobindo's spiritual explanation of the rise and decline of Asia does not explain why they could not bring their initial successes in the arts of life and political organization to a successful consummation and compete on equal terms with European powers. Hence I think the problem of the downfall of Asia is still an open question for philosophers of history. It would require a theory of plural causation attributing due importance to the various factors which may vary in relative degree of influence in different epochs. But the great merit of Aurobindo's theory is that, however inadequate, it brings attention to the role of the spiritual factor in history by the sheer vehemence and enthusiasm by which he has put the theory forward and the deep and sincere conviction with which he holds it.

Aurobindo refers to certain dominant features in Asiatic civilizations; for example, order, a secure and long-established moral and religious framework, a settled economic structure and a natural social organization which in course of time got converted into a conventional system based upon superiority and hierarchy. But all these four elements were rooted in Asia's "religious sense and sweetened and made tolerable by a strong communal feeling, a living humanity and sympathy and a certain access to human equality and closeness".[1] Any thorough analysis of the foundations of the social and political characteristics of a people is ultimately turned into a question of metaphysics—what is primary and intrinsic, matter or spirit, and arriving at a decision on that point involves not only an intellectual study of the sciences and cosmology, but also one's emotional background and psychological preferences and experiences. An idealistic thinker would consider spirit to be ultimate saviour of Asia and the world, and Aurobindo does hold that in the immediate future there would possibly be the rise of a spiritualized Asiatic subjectivism which would contribute to the solution of the crises of civilization.[2]

[1] Sri Aurobindo, "After the War", *Sri Aurobindo Mandira Annual*, 1949, p. 181.
[2] *The Human Cycle*, p. 25.

Creativism, according to Aurobindo, is the characteristic essence of the spirit and in his spiritual interpretation of India's historical evolution he analyzes the dynamic achievements of the Indian people in the realms of intellect, politics, society and art. He describes in exalted terms the excellence and perfection attained in all of these four spheres by the power of the spirit. He considers that the spiritual urge is not negative, barren and sterilizing but is the source of a many-sided creative development and activity.[1] It has sometimes been suggested that the dominant spirituality of India is the outcome of the lack of vital power. According to some European Indologists the want of physical and vital capacity was produced by the mixture with inferior races. Even Tagore accepted that living in the tropical east, Indians did not have a surplus of physical energy for external action and therefore instead of struggle and fight, they laid the emphasis on inward peace, quiet concentration and the achievement of a harmony with all.[2] Aurobindo would not accept this materialistic explanation but would offer the view that spirituality in India has been a matter of deliberate, intellectual and moral acceptance and is not simply an epiphenomenon of the want of vital energy. Perhaps his point of view would be substantiated by the examples of other Asiatic races like the Malayans and the Chinese who also do not have, in any case, more vital and physical energy than the Indians but have not been on that account spiritually-oriented, or in no instance more spiritual than those races who have more physical energy. Spiritual preference is not a function of physical or vital weakness and deterioration.

The secret of the dynamic and plethoric cultural and political achievements of India lay in the pursuit of the spiritual power of Brahmacarya. The all-important discipline of Brahmacarya was the secret of the gigantic intellectuality, luminous spirituality and the superhuman moral force that one finds pulsating in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. It supported the heroism and the self-abandonment of the Kshatriya, the Sikh and the Rajput. Brahmacarya was the spiritual dynamic behind Indian civilization which remains unexcelled by others in the massiveness of outline and in the perfection of the details

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *The Significance of Indian Art*, pp. 102-3.
[2] Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man*.

of its creations.[1] The culture and morals of India regarded it as their basis.[2] Brahmacarya is the process of the transformation of the surplus of physical energy into intellectual and spiritual power.[3] It is supposed to generate a kind of spiritual electricity which enkindles the power of Prana or the primal energy that proceeds from ether. An infinite energy or Sakti which is a dynamic mainfestation of the absolute being pervades the world. The phenomenal existence of the animal and plant world shows them to be receptacles of this energy. Brahmacarya is a technique of the moral conservation of this energy. In Indian literature, Brahmacarya is lauded and has been considered a vital aid to success in the spiritual field but to Aurobindo it is not merely a process of spiritual advancement but is the force behind civilization itself. It was the foundation on which the magnificent Indian culture and civilization were built. A similar explanation of European Renaissance creativism and activism has been given by Berdyaev who considers that the monasticism, asceticism and chivalry of the Middle Ages helped to preserve the power and energy of the peoples that showed forth with resplendence since the fifteenth century.[4] Though Brahmacarya has been responsible for the many-sided achievements of the Indians, it has particularly helped to create the powerful brain of ancient India. Philosophy, according to Aurobindo, shows the achievements of India at its height and this philosophy was not primarily dialectical metaphysical system-building but represented the intellectual generalization of profound cosmic experiences of life and the spirit.

Both in India and Greece one gets a mystical stage of philosophical speculation. The Vedas and the older Upanishads in India, the Dionysian, Apollonian and Eleusinian mysteries in Greece and the mystery religions of ancient Egypt are the products of that first symbolic and spiritual age of humanity. This age was followed by the rise of metaphysical systems in India and the works of the dialecticians, the sophists and the rationalists in Greece.[5] The mighty development of an intellectual civilization in ancient India is depicted in the

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *The Brain of India* (Arya Publishing House, Calcutta, 1944), pp. 11-16.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19. [3] *Ibid.*, p.14.
[4] N. Berdyaev, *The Meaning of History*, p. 126.
[5] Sri Aurobindo, *Heraclitus*, pp. 8-9.

Mahabharata where one sees great philosophers and Yogins, diplomats and statesmen, fighters and leaders in diverse branches of human activity.[1] Even Buddhism which in some of its subjectivistic, relativistic and nihilistic phases stressed pessimism and world-negation was intellectually very creative. Buddhism emphasized *tapasya* which means not merely external askesis but is a technique for the conservation of moral and physical energy.[2] In its subtle metaphysics, in its noble ethical code and in its all-encompassing spirit of higher idealism it was "powerfully creative both in the arts which interpret life and in society and politics".[3]

In analyzing the intellectual productions of ancient India Aurobindo exalts the role of Valmiki, Vyasa, Kalidasa and Samkara.[4] Valmiki represents the predominantly moral mood of Indian civilization and in his social outlook is a conservative idealist. Vyasa is the progressive realist depicting a powerful intellectual civilization. Kalidasa is the prophet of a materialistic and hedonistic civilization.[5] The poetry of Kalidasa is not comparable to that of Vyasa and Valmiki in terms of elevation and idealism and it has not been a dynamic force for moulding heroic temper and moral character. Kalidasa lived in an aristocratic civilization and represents the sentiments, attitudes and value-constellations of a vitalistic and materialistic epoch. But even the most materialistic and hedonistic periods of Indian civilization show a balance and rhythm, a kind of self-limitation, an intellectual, ethical and aesthetic order and the general orientation toward a vital and mental integration and synthesis.[6] ". . . its [India's] most hedonistic period offers nothing that at all resembles the unbridled corruption which a similar tendency has produced in Europe. For the Indian mind is not only spiritual and ethical, but intellectual and artistic and both the rule of the intellect and the rhythms of beauty are hostile to the spirit of chaos."[7] Here as in several of his other views about comparative history one cannot help feeling that Aurobindo is expressing only some vague and large intuitions

[1] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 58.
[2] *The Hyman Cycle*, pp. 201-2.
[3] Sri Aurobindo, *The Renaissance in India*, p. 51.
[4] Sri Aurobindo, *Kalidasa*, pp. 1-2.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 50.
[6] Sri Aurobindo, *The Renaissance in India*, pp. 23-4.
[7] *Ibid.*, p. 24.

and is not careful to substantiate them with reference to empirical historical details.

Between the rise of Buddhism and the advent of Samkara the Indian mind became scientific and hence it had an external orientation even in its spiritualism and metaphysics. This period, therefore, shows the growth of formalized metaphysics, science and law. But the externalistic orientation did not generate agnosticism and scepticism and the sensationalistic doctrines of Carvaka did not get any ready following in the country. Aurobindo, though an uncompromising opponent of the world-negating trends in the Vedantism of Samkara, is a great admirer of the latter's role in the philosophic and cultural evolution of India.[1] He praises the lofty and ascetic intellect of Samkara whose personality has left the permanent impact of its dynamism on Indian history. The advent of Samkara marks the preparation for the new spiritual epoch which was continued by Vaishnavism and Saivism. But the new spiritual age did not get the chance of transforming and recasting the life of the nation in a spiritual mould because of the advent of the barbarians and the Moslems. Samkara had come after a materialistic age; he and his successors "nourished the seeds of rebirth and renewal"[2] and that spiritual reservoir continued to give to India an inexhaustible vitality and power.

From the times of Asoka till the Moslem epoch there was an age of prolific intellectual production in India and "there is no historical parallel for such intellectual labour and activity before the invention of printing and the facilities provided by modern science".[3] Perhaps this latter statement of Aurobindo does not take into consideration the stupendous creations of medieval Europe manifested in its classic form by the unbelievable intellectual productivity of Albertus Magnus and St. Thomas Aquinas.

The predominant emphasis on the spirit has been responsible for non-secularism in the several departments of human activity in India. The Europeans and the Mongolians have been more secularly-oriented than the Indians.[4] The theological traditions

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *Kalidasa*, pp. 13, 25, 26.
[2] Sri Aurobindo, *Kalidasa*, p. 24.
[3] Sri Aurobindo, *The Renaissance in India*, pp. 16-17.
[4] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 123.

and the ecclesiastical encumbrances of the Brahmins have been responsible for the predominance of the other-worldly concerns and outlook found in certain periods of Indian history and culture. Only the advent of the Europeans has intensified in India the dominant values of political and secular considerations and has strengthened the notions of political self-consciousness and unity. The comparative lack of secular considerations imparts to Indian metaphysics a spiritual character. Metaphysics or *Darsana* in India is only a rational and logically coherent systematization of spiritual and mystical inward vision and experience. Metaphysics in France and specially in Germany, on the other hand, is "profound idea-spinning".[1] In modern European philosophy since the time of Descartes and Leibnitz one finds intellectual generalizations on the basis of the facts, phenomena and laws brought forward and discovered by the physical sciences, especially physics. Ancient Indian metaphysics is not at all scientific in this sense. Indian intellectual achievement is marked by the relative absence of the disadvantages of a rational faculty insisting on too much of mechanical planning.[2] Aurobindo thinks that the spiritual orientation of India's intellectual development follows from the great emphasis which the Hindu sages and seers laid upon a concrete intuitional realization of the Atman and not upon barren abstract metaphysical constructions about it. Paradoxically, spiritual pragmatism is a characteristic of Indian culture. In spite of its great idealism, we do not find in Indian political thought the construction of systems of sociology and political science on the basis of mere abstract intelligence. Indian idealism has strengthened the moral and political self of India. Aurobindo would never consider idealism to be a reactionary philosophy trying to create the concept of an immutable motionless being only to hide the social contradictions of an existing society. Idealistic philosophy has been used both for serving the powers of good and evil and has been an intellectual basis both for reaction and progress. Tilak and Gandhi in India and Plato, Cicero, Dante, Mazzini, T.H. Green and others in Europe show that idealism can be the basis of social progress both on the theoretical and the practical planes.

[1] *The Renaissance in India*, pp. 50-1.
[2] *The Spirit and Form of Indian Polity*, pp. 27-9.

The spiritual foundations of Indian intellectual idealism strengthened by the processes of Brahmacarya and Yoga and Tapasya, created the strong and powerful mind of ancient India. "The ancient Indian mind no less fertile in political invention, must be considered superior to that of the mercurial and restless Mediterranean people in the capacity for firm organisation."[1] Aurobindo exalts Indian encyclopaedism. "The highest creative intellects in Europe have achieved sovereignty by limitation, by striving to excel only in the field of a single intellectual province or at most in two. When they have been versatile it has been by sacrificing height to breadth. But in India it is the greatest who have been the most versatile and passed from one field of achievement to another."[2] Aurobindo tries to substantiate his statement about comprehensive Indian encyclopaedism with references to the towering creations of Kalidasa and Samkara and the profound spiritual realizations of Ramkrishna and to the "universality of the ordinary curriculum in ancient India".[3] It is true that Aurobindo wrote this statement when he was an ardent nationalist fighting against an alien power and civilization that was not only politically and economically more powerful and better organized than the Indian but also was highly and aggressively proud of its intellectual superiority. If Aurobindo wants to refute this claim of European intellectual greatness on an emotional plane he could justifiably do that as a nationalist agitator and propagandist. But I feel that from an objective standpoint he is minimizing European encyclopaedism. Ancient India, in spite of the chemist-philosopher Nagarjuna, grammarian-philosopher-physician Patanjali, the philosopher-poet Kalidasa and the poet-philosopher Samkara, Bharavi, the writer of the *Bhattikavyam*, the Puranas, and even in spite of the poetry, didactics, history, theology, of the much-enshrined encyclopaedic Bhagavata Purana and the Mahabharata, does not present a specimen comparable to the thorough-going and detailed encyclopaedism of Aristotle who wrote not only on the humanities, politics, logic and metaphysics but also on astronomy, physics and biology. In the persons of Leonardo, Leibnitz, Kant, Hegel, Marx and

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 10.
[2] Sri Aurobindo, *The Brain of India*, pp. 26-7.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 25.

Spencer modern Europe has been encyclopaedic. I do not think that anybody would challenge the encyclopaedism of Thomas Aquinas in the Middle Ages. I have a strong conviction that as a philosopher reflecting and generalizing on comparative history, Aurobindo shows sometimes want of empirical substantiations of his generalizations. But his exalted patriotic attempt to reveal the intellectual greatness of ancient India, although it may not be absolutely unchallenged from the standpoint of comparative cultural history, has been a significant attempt in the direction of strengthening the morale and self-confidence of a dependent country. Aurobindo's vision of the evolution of intellectual history is certainly wider than that of Hegel.

(*b*) *Reflections on Indian Political Evolution*

Sometimes critics who recognize the excellent achievements of the Hindus in the fields of spirit, art and intellect hint at their incapacity in the management of the political and economic realm. Hegel, Spengler and Berdyaev emphasize the political inefficiency of the Hindus. According to Aurobindo the dominant tendency of Indian history for the last two thousand years is the persistent attempt at the realization of pan-Indian unity and the frequent near approach to a successful consummation of the task.[1] It is true that India had failed to achieve political unity for any long period of time but the non-consummation of political integration does not necessarily indicate the absence of a mature political sense. If political disintegration and disunity are the only criteria of political incapacity then we find that, in spite of the attempts of the Romans, Charlemagne, Otto, Napoleon and even Hitler, Europe is still not united. The medieval dreams of a unified European political rule as visualized by Dante and other Christian apologists of the ghost of the Roman empire have almost turned to nothing, and rampant aggressive nationalism has taken a heavy toll of European lives and resources. True

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 36; In *Dharma Aur Jatiyata* (in Hindi) p. 104, Sri Aurobindo mentions three obstacles to the national unification of India: (*i*) Provincial differences, (*ii*) Hindu-Moslem differences, (*iii*) The absence of the vision of India as the Mother.

to his basic intuition that the creativism and dynamism of the spirit must also have political and vital repercussions, Aurobindo discerns a strong powerful centralizing and conquering movement in Indian history.

> Empire shall in thy line and forceful brain
> Persist, the boundless impulse towards rule
> Of grandiose souls perpetually recur,
> And minds immense and personalities
> With battle and with passion and with storm
> Shall burn through Aryan history, the speech
> of Ages.[1]

Certainly in the Vedic concept of the *Samrat*, the typologies of political power in the Aitaraya Brahmana, the Buddhist view of *Chakravarti*, the Arthasastra notion of *Mandala* and in the vast body of Sanskrit literature, one can trace a "grandiose imperial equipoise".[2]

It is not necessary that creative vitalism and political vigour be expressed only through unified central monarchies. In the comparative analysis of the different periods of creativeness in India's history Aurobindo distinguishes three eras.[3] First, the heroic period when India was most creative and productive. It was when the country was divided into small kingdoms. He does not specify the achievements but possibly he is referring to the exploits mentioned in the Rig Veda, the Brahmanas, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Secondly, the period of small nations and kingdoms like the Pallavas, Chalukyas, Pandyas, Cholas and Cheras. Historically, the Pallavas, the Chalukyas and the Cholas have indeed been significant in South Indian history. The Chalukyas also attempted a conquest of Kanauj while the Cholas had ambitions even beyond the Indian ocean but the specific achievements of the Cheras and the Pandyas are doubtful.[4] The third period marks the ascen-

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *Urvasie*, Canto IV, Collected Poems and Plays (Pondichery, 1942), vol. I, p. 80.

[2] Sri Aurobindo, *Kalidasa*, p. 5.

[3] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 4-5; Sisirkumar Mitra, "Sri Aurobindo and Indian Polity", *Sri Aurobindo Circle Number* (1940), pp. 153-70, presents a concise summary of Sri Aurobindo's view about the spirit and forms of Indian polity.

[4] R.G. Bhandarkar, *Early History of the Deccan*; Heras, *Studies in Pallava History*; Nilkanta Shastri, *The Cholas*; Jouveau Dubreuil, *Ancient History of the Deccan*;

dency of great empires like those of the Mauryas, the Guptas or the Moghuls. It is true that Aurobindo is not constructing this threefold scheme on the basis of historical sequence of temporal progression but with reference to the area of geographical territory governed from a central capital. Compared to the achievements of the first two periods of small political entities, India accomplished little in the third. Of course, there was political and administrative organization and some fine artistic and literary achievement, but the imperial epoch did not evince the same plethora of cultural productiveness as the early period of small states. Perhaps Aurobindo is minimizing the cultural achievements of Asoka and the Gupta emperors as compared to those of the Pallavas and the Chalukyas. From the standpoint of sound history we cannot rate the period of the Pallavas, Chalukyas, Pandyas, Cholas and Cheras as culturally higher and more brilliant than those of the Mauryas and the Guptas.[1] But the broad thesis of Aurobindo that political expansion and centralization are not necessarily parallelled by cultural creativism would stand empirical validation. He accepts the historically sound view that modern Europe owes a large part of its civilization to its little independent states.[2] The Israelites have left a powerful legacy of monotheistic religion, social justice and law to European civilization. The rationalistic philosophy and aesthetic art of the Greeks are still the pride of Europe. The medieval movement of civic liberty amongst the Latins like the French and the Italians, which in spite of its temporary failure "revived with a hundredfold force in the French Revolution and was the impetuous rush earthwards of the souls which had fought for it hundreds of years before",[3] was carried on amongst small political units. The examples of the German humanists like Herder, German poets like Schiller and Goethe, and the German idealists from Kant to Hegel to Schopenhauer would also substantiate Aurobindo's thesis, because these towering figures in Germany flourished before

J. Dubreuil, *Pallavas*; S.K. Aiyangar, *Beginnings of South Indian History*; Nilkanta Shastri, *Pandyan Kingdom*; Kielhorn, *List of the Inscriptions of Southern India*.

[1] H.C. Raychaudhry, *Political History of Ancient India* (5th edition); Works on Asoka by Smith, D.R. Bhandarkar and Mookerjee; Fleet, *Inscrriptions of the Early Gupta Kings*; R.D. Banerjea, *Age of the Imperial Guptas*; R.K. Mookerjee, *Hindu Civilization*; R.C. Dutt, *Civilization in Ancient India*.

[2] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 4. [3] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 16.

Bismarck unified Germany through the Austro-Prussian and the Franco-Prussian wars. Germany was not a unified state in those days. To me the reason for such a phenomenon seems to be that political centralization, perhaps, makes political considerations and valuations central and there is a trend toward the politicization of the cultural and intellectual ethos. In a large imperial and centralized state the individual seems to lose his spiritual autonomy and being in the vastness of an impersonal social universe, and hence the self-introspective subjective self-consciousness which is the seed of all great cultural achievements seems to be pulverized.

In the course of his reflections upon India's political evolution Aurobindo denies the historicity of a racial division between the Aryan invaders and the native dark-skinned population.[1] He gives a cultural and not a biological interpretation of the word Aryan. The word Arya can be derived in two ways and it will signify either a cultivator (from *Ar* to plough) of the field created by the supreme spirit or a fighter for divine wisdom (from *Ar* to fight).[2] But he does, nevertheless, accept two types of culture in ancient India.[3] First, the Aryan, occupying the Punjab and northern and central India, Afghanistan and perhaps Persia. The worship of the sun and the fire and the Soma sacrifice were its principal religious characteristics. The second was the un-Aryan which occupied the east, south and west. The nature of this culture cannot be exactly delineated because of the scarcity of accurate materials. Thus we see that in spite of his denial of references to a racial warfare in the Vedas, Aurobindo almost accepts the views of the European historians about the two types of cultural configurations and their diffusions in ancient India. The culture that began in the Vedas had by the time of the later Guptas lost its political greatness, and by the middle of the fifth century A.D., "India had already lost. . . the

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *On the Veda* (Pondichery, 1956), pp. 45-6.

[2] Sri Aurobindo, *Views and Reviews*, pp. 6-7. The first derivation is put forward by European philologists. Aurobindo does not accept it but he says that this derivation could be accepted in a spiritual sense and an Arya would be one who cultivates the field made by the divine spirit. The word Arya in its second derivation is comparable to the Greek "Aros"—the war-god and the Greek *areios*, brave or warlike. Thus he who fights for the sake of divine wisdom is an Arya.

[3] Sri Aurobindo, *Views and Reviews*, pp. 45-6.

chance of a natural and perfect flowering of her true mind and inmost spirit in the political life of her peoples".[1]

The Muslim invasions occurred in India at a time when after two thousand years of manifold creativeness and activity the vitality of Indian life and culture "was already exhausted for a time or very near exhaustion and needed a breathing space to rejuvenate herself by transference from the Sanskrit to the popular tongues and the newly forming regional peoples".[2] Here we find Aurobindo accepting the theory of a rejuvenation or revival and renaissance of cultures. According to Hegel the *Weltgeist* manifests itself once in one particular nation and after that that nation would be relegated to a backward position. Spengler gives a biological form to this Hegelian theory by accepting that, arising from a proto-soul with some prime symbols, every culture completes a four-phased cycle of early culture, culture, late culture and civilization. Once the cycle is finished that particular culture would never rise again although by the sheer force of historical inertia or sometimes by a "second religiosity" it could breathe and exist for some time. India and China are in this state of "historylessness" according to Spengler.

The Muslims, according to Aurobindo, introduced the struggle between two civilizations.[3] The real problem was not one of political subjection and freedom but a struggle between the ancient and indigenous Indian civilization spiritually tolerant but characterized by an uncatholic conventionalized social structure, and the medieval and foreign Muslim civilization which was militant and aggressive. Akbar and Nanak made spiritual attempts to solve the problem but failed.[4] Akbar failed because he wanted to create a political and intellectual eclecticism rather than a genuine organic spiritual form and hence his creed won the adherence of neither of the two communities. Nanak failed because the universal aspects of his teachings became narrowed into a credal sect. Aurobindo regards Aurangzeb as the real culprit responsible for Hindu-Muslim differences. But for the political stupidity of Aurangzeb it is possible that the Hindus and the Muslims could have united

[1] *The Spirit and Form of Indian Polity*, p. 82.
[2] *Ibid*, p. 86.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 88.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 88-9.

like the British Catholics and the Protestants.[1] But despite Aurangzeb's fanaticism the Moghul empire was "infinitely more liberal and tolerant in religion than any medieval or contemporary European kingdom or empire".[2]

According to Aurobindo there could have been two possible solutions of the Indo-Muslim struggle of civilization.[3] The first was the emergence of a greater spiritual principle or formation uniting the two communities. This solution was attempted by Akbar and Nanak but proved unsuccessful. The second was the rise of a political patriotism uniting the two communities. The sentiments of nationalism, creating a common bond of affectual and psychic loyalty and transcending the other divergent and dissentient elements, could not bear fruition. Akbar made some incipient attempts in this direction but they proved abortive.

In conformity with his spiritual interpretation of Indian history trying to trace the saving power of the spirit behind political turmoils and vicissitudes, Aurobindo refers to the spiritual impetus behind the rise of the Marathas and the Sikhs. Shivaji tried to put into concrete shape the ideology of a Maharastra Dharma propounded by Ramdas. It was an attempt at the partial restoration of the spirit and form of the old Indian political institutionalism but it failed "as all attempts to revive the past must fail, in spite of the spiritual impetus and democratic forces that assisted its inception".[4] The Peshwas did not possess the commanding personality and organizational genius of Shivaji and instead of thinking along broad national lines they were inspired only by sentiments of regional patriotism.

The Sikh Khalsa was futurist in its orientation. "Apart and singularist in its theocratic head and democratic soul and structure, its profound spiritual beginning, its first attempt to combine the deepest elements of Islam and Vedanta",[5] it failed. It could not extend to a large area although it created some very intense feelings and loyalties. Aurobindo finds a spiritual factor behind its decline because "it could not create between the spirit and the external life the transmitting medium of a

[1] *Dharma Aur Jatiyata*, p. 104. Cf. Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, (Calcutta, 1946), pp. 229-30: "Aurangzeb puts the clock back."
[2] *The Spirit and Form of Indian Polity*, p. 89.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 88. [4] *Ibid.*, p. 90. [5] *Ibid.*, pp. 90-1.

rich creative thought and culture"[1] and therefore proved to be only an abortive and premature attempt at the creation of a spiritualized society. Thus we find Aurobindo tracing the causes of the rich political, material and imperialistic splendours of pre-Guptan India, as well as those of the failures of the Mughals, the Marathas and the Sikhs, to the spiritual factor; in the first case to its successful pursuit, in the second either to its sad neglect or inadequate realization.

We also find Aurobindo making some observations on the institutional development and socio-political evolution of Indian civilizations. He discerns four historical stages.[2] First, the simple Aryan community; secondly, a long period of transition marked by various types of organizational experimentation; thirdly, the definite formation of the monarchical state co-ordinating and harmonizing all the complex elements of the communal popular life into regional and imperial unities. There has always been a complex life in ancient India marked by a multiplicity of institutions and organizations like the joint-family system, the caste, the town and the village meeting. Fourthly, the period of decline marked by the advent of foreigners from Western Asia and Europe, whose attempts to impose new systems on the country led to internal arrest and stagnation.

Throughout political and institutional development[3] in ancient India one finds the prevalence of an organically self-determining communal freedom. There was the prevalence of a free synthetic communal order and it aimed at the realization not of individual liberty but of communal freedom.[4] The Indian political system aimed at the synthesis of communal autonomies. The regional autonomies of the village, the town, the capital city, the caste, the guild and the family were all harmonized. The state or the kingdom or the confederation was not the alien dictator imposing a network of associational units and managing them in a bureaucratic way but was a co-ordinator and harmonizer "synthetising in a free and living organic system these autonomies".[5] According to Aurobindo the altruistic sentiments of the Indian political temper were expressed through "a partial communism in the village

[1] *Ibid.* [2] *Ibid.*, p. 36. [3] Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, pp. 118-20.
[4] *The Spirit and Form of Indian Polity*, pp. 37, 38, 39. [5] *Ibid.*, p. 73.

system".[1] Marx and Engels also refer to the long and continued prevalence of the communal type of economy in India and China. Ancient India presented the spectacle not only of monarchical forms and types but also of republican entities.[2] The institutions and ideas of the *Kula* and the *Kuladharma* expressed the collectivist tendencies of the Indian people aiming not only at individual growth and being but also at the preservation of some long-established traditions. This collectivist and co-operative feeling strengthened the social bonds of the joint-family system and made the latter "the strong economic base of medieval Hinduism".[3] The associational units continued to be the foci and units of a communal living, and were inter-subjective bonds and interests till the advent of the mechanical Western rule[4] which, in the process of a vast institutional bureaucratization, tended to suppress the older communal and regional autonomies and substitute instead a legalist concept of contractual civic freedom.

Aurobindo, thus, tries to refute the charge of political immaturity and incapacity of the Hindus.[5] Here he is in line with what I call the positivist and sociological interpretation of Indian culture and history which began with the writings of Swami Dayananda. Without accepting the validity of Dayananda's researches and conclusions about the anticipations of the most modern scientific and physical discoveries in the Vedas, we can confidently say that he and his disciples gave vigorous attention to the discovery and decipherment of the achievements of the ancient Hindus in the realms of science, medicine, politics and social organization. Although anticipated by Thibaut's book on the achievements of the Hindus in the realms of the mathematical sciences, B.N. Seal and the scholars inspired by him made a study of the achievements of the ancient Hindus in the various branches of scientific, social, political and cultural activities. They made a conscious effort to refute the observation that the Hindus have been primarily a race of transcendental metaphysicians. They did so on the basis of historical mono-

[1] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 26.
[2] K.P. Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*: V.P. Varma, *Hindu Political Thought and its Metaphysical Foundations*, pp. 31-5; Sri Aurobindo, *Hamari Swatantrata Kaisi Ho* (in Hindi), p. 16.
[3] *The Human Cycle*, pp. 198-9. [4] *The Spirit and Form of Indian Polity*. p. 75.
[5] Sri Aurobindo, *Hamari Svatantrata Kaisi Ho* (In Hindi), p. 16.

graphs and researches. Aurobindo's book *The Foundations of Indian Culture* is a very significant study of the manifold creativeness of Indians in the mundane departments of life. K.P. Jayaswal was another veteran in this field and Aurobindo pays tribute to "the luminous and scrupulously documented contribution of Mr. Jayaswal to the subject"[1] (the institutional development in ancient India). With the advancing current of Indian nationalism and the eventual coming of freedom the positivistic researches into Indian culture have been extended several-fold. Today in the entire country one finds a network of scholars who are trying to reveal the greatness of India in the materialistic, vitalistic, aesthetic and political fields.

But in Aurobindo's interpretations of Indian political and historical evolution we always find attempts at the synthesis of the transcendental and the positive. In his metaphysics Aurobindo attempted a reconciliation of the Vedantic teachings and the conclusions of modern science. In his philosophy of political history also he is content not merely with describing the dynamic achievements of India in the realms of political centralization, empire-building and institutional and associational developments but he always posits the creative power of the spirit behind.

(c) *The Sociology of the Caste System*

Aurobindo applies his spiritual concept of history to the interpretation of the caste system. European sociologists, anthropologists and historians have interpreted the caste system in terms of a hierarchical social organization based on endogamy and social distance. One can find a social class in almost all civilizations. The caste is an attempt at constructing the social structure sanctioned by religious law and custom and rigidly emphasizing the principle of heredity. Racial differences, professional differentiations and other factors like religious groupings have been considered to be the constituent and component elements that have made the Indian caste system an almost unique institution in the world. Among the peoples of the ancient world, the Sumerians and the Semites of Mesopota-

[1] *The Spirit and Form of Indian Polity*, p. 47.

mia did not have any caste system. We find some hints about the incipient existence of caste system since the beginning of Egypt's dynastic history.[1] On the basis of the Vedic word *Varna*, which means colour, it has been argued that the caste system arose in India because of a racial difference between the conquering light-skinned Indo-Aryans and the dark-skinned peoples who were living here from early times. If this analysis of the racial origin of the caste were correct, it is surprising that the infiltration of the Hyksos, the Kassites and the Mitannians (who also were either wholly Aryan or had a predominant number of Indo-European-speaking peoples amongst them) into Egypt and West Asiatic society should not have produced a corresponding social stratification like the Indian caste.

Aurobindo does not accept the historicity of a racial war and social struggle based on race in ancient India. *Varna* according to him is a symbolic and typal institution which with the passage of time got conventionalized into caste. 'According to the symbolic interpretation of the *Varna* based on the *Purusa Sukta* one finds that the Brahmin signified the divine as knowledge in man, the Kshattriya the divine as power, the Vaishya, the divine engaged in production, enjoyment and neutrality and the Sudra, the divine engaged in service, obedience and work. "Human society was for them (the Vedic peoples) an attempt to express in life the cosmic *Purusha* who has expressed himself otherwise in the material and the supraphysical universe."[2] In its psychological orientation the system of *Varna* supported the plasticity and catholicity of Hindu society by providing opportunities for a graded working out of the latent potencies and capabilities of human nature.[3] But in the process of its historical evolution the rigidity of caste system became an obstacle to further social experimentation.[4]

According to Aurobindo one great merit of a harmonious social structure has been the absence of exclusive forms of class rule in ancient India.[5] There was no monopolization of political

[1] Kroeber, "Caste", *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* (henceforward the abbreviated form *E.S.S.* will be used to indicate these volumes of this Encyclopaedia).

[2] *The Human Cycle*, p. 7.

[3] For the (*i*) social and economic, (*ii*) cultural and (*iii*) spiritual significance of the four orders, see the *Essays on the Gita*, vol. II, pp. 330-2.

[4] *The Life Divine* (American Edition), p. 776.

[5] *The Spirit and Form of Indian Polity*, pp. 42-4.

powers by a priestly theocracy as in Tibet. There was no landed and military aristocracy of the British or the French type establishing its feudal rule for any considerable period. We do not get in India the parallel of a mercantile oligarchy as in Carthage and Venice. The counterparts of the Roman struggle between the patricians and the plebeians or the Athenian struggle between the oligarchic and democratic elements from the times of Solon and Cleisthenes to Pericles and the Thirty Tyrants are also absent in India. In modern times some Marxist writers have tried to interpret ancient Indian history in terms of the class struggles between rival groups but I do not think they have brought forward adequate empirical substantiations. The historical generalizations arrived at by Marx and Engels after a study of European history cannot be applied to India without substantial reservations and modifications.

A spiritual and psychological interpretation of the ancient Indian social structure similar to what we find in Aurobindo[1] has also been advanced by Dayananda, Vivekananda, Gandhi, Bhagvan Das, Radhakrishnan, etc. Gandhi and Bhagvan Das even considered the Varna system to be an alternative to socialism. Bhagvan Das contrasted the mechanical and violent character of the latter with the organic-cooperative and peaceful character of the former. Vivekananda held the view that the caste system had saved Indian society from being submerged and deculturized under the pressure of barbarian hordes.

Without denying some of the psychological and sociological merits of the system one cannot help feeling that by creating intermediate groups commanding allegiance and loyalty the caste system in recent times has been a great factor for hindering

[1] According to Aurobindo, the *Varna* was the characteristic feature of a spiritualized typal society (*The Human Cycle*, p. 154). But the typal principle cannot be the foundation of an ideal human society because the type aims to establish the significant elements in a man's nature—his *Swabhava*—as the criterion of his action and operation or *Swadharma*. So far as the social philosophy of Aurobindo himself is concerned he aims to go beyond the *Varna* principle. He pleads for an integral manifestation of the concealed divinity within the individuals and the collectivities. Hence he says: ". . . each man contains in himself the whole divine potentiality and therefore the Shudra cannot be rigidly confined within his Shudrahood, nor the Brahmin in his Brahminhood, but each contains within himself the potentialities and the need of perfection of his other elements of a divine manhood" (*The Human Cycle*, p. 155). Thus it is clear that on the foundations of a spiritual metaphysics Aurobindo would plead for going beyond the social conservatism of the *Varna* order.

Indian nationalism and impeding economic progress on a large scale. Even at the level of theory it has sometimes preached gross intolerance and a contempt for those below.[1] At times it has sanctioned social totalitarianism by advocating the total control of a man's social activities with reference to laws made and given either by people who were Brahmins, or had Brahmanic affiliations and sympathies, and having sanctions and penalties both temporal and super-temporal attached to them. The reform of the caste system is an urgent and imperative social necessity.

(*d*) *The Philosophy of Indian Art*

Intellectual culture, politics, society and art have been the four fields where Aurobindo has applied his spiritual philosophy of history in the Indian context. Art has intimate connexions with political philosophy and we find one of the greatest writers on politics, Plato, advocating the censorship and even the exclusion of the arts that aim to corrupt society by an appeal to sensuousness. According to Plato art is a deflection of reality —it is thrice removed from the reality. Plato and St. Augustine, and in our own days Tolstoy and Gandhi, have condemned art because of its reference to the vulgar and the sensuous. Tolstoy would appreciate only art which would unite man with God.[2] Aurobindo accepts the spiritual function of art and hence would repudiate the theories of Schelling and others who trace the origin of art to some sexual or other biological or playful activity of man. The serious character of art has been emphasized by Spengler in his view that art is one of the dominant symbolic ways of expressing the basic world-feelings of mature cultures. According to Aurobindo, although the first primitive object of art might have been purely a reproduction of nature, other aims become attached to it in the course of its evolution. Besides the purely aesthetic, there is the intellectual or educative aspect of art. Art becomes the interpretation or intuitive revelation of

[1] Even Aurobindo refers to the prevalence of "economic serfdom" created by the existence of "the proletariat, called in India the Shudra",—*The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 103-4.

[2] Tolstoy, *What is Art?* (1896), English Translation by A. Maude, 1905, Oxford, sections XV & XVI.

existence through the forms of life and nature.[1] The highest aim of art is spiritual.[2] Art is to be an aid to the elevation and purification of the soul, something like the *Katharsis* of the Greeks. Aristotle referred to the purification of feelings and passions by imaginative treatment of them in poetry. We also find such sentiments in Mammata, the author of *Kavyaprakasha.* According to Hegel, art is the subjective, imaginative and intuitional aspect of the manifestation of the supreme Idea or the absolute spirit.[3]

Art in India has been predominantly symbolic. It is supposed to portray some supreme theological or divine theme and hence the spiritual orientation has been dominant.[4] In the field of art, whether it be scuplture, architecture or painting, Aurobindo finds a strong substantiation of his philosophy of history which emphasizes the creative power of the spirit also in mundane spheres. In Western art spirit is dependent on the form because there primacy is attached to a successful structural finish. In Indian art, on the other hand, primacy belongs to the spirit and consequently the lines, and the arrangements of shape, posture and colour are only adjuncts for the vivid portrayal of the spiritual emotion. The element of immediacy is dominant in Western art, the element of transcendence in the Indian. The Western artists emphasize immediate fidelity to nature. In India the artist aims at experiencing a vision or some ethereal emotion and then he seeks for instrumental aid for concretizing that emotion.[5] His aim is not mere re-production of something existing in nature or society; he aims at a psychical transmutation. Therefore, as a broad generalization it can be stated that the Western artist looks to nature, the Indian to the soul. This

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *The Significance of Indian Art* (Bombay, 1947), pp. 90-2.
[2] Sri Aurobindo, *The National Value of Art*, p. 17.
[3] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, section 341. Cf. Hegel: "In its noblest work it (Art) is occupied with representing, not indeed the Spirit of God, but certainly the Form of God; and in its secondary aims, that which is divine and spiritual generally. Its office is to render visible the Divine, presenting it to the imaginative and intuitive faculty."
[4] Cf. Heinrich Zimmer, *Kunstform und Yoga in indischen Kunstbild* (Berlin, 1926).
[5] Cf. *The Human Cycle*, pp. 173-4: "The discrimination which works in the creator is, therefore, not an intellectual self-criticism . . . . It comes as part of that influx of power and light from above which by its divine enthusiasm lifts the faculties into their intense suprarational working. . . . He ought rather to call to his aid the intuitive critical vision and embody it in a fresh act of inspired creation or re-creation after bringing himself back by its means into harmony with the light and law of his original creative initiation."

basic difference, according to Aurobindo, operates at all levels of cultural manifestation and in the spheres of religion, philosophy, literature, art, etc. The quest for the eternal and spiritual amidst the fluent transiency of the universe is the basic aim of Indian culture and also of its art.

Differentiating the different conceptions of unity as held by the Hellenic, the Gothic and the Indian artists Aurobindo states that Greek unity was obtained by much suppression and limitation of details and circumstance. The predominant Christian inspiration behind Gothic art led to the casting of everything in the mould of a single religious aspiration. On the other hand, in India the unity aimed at in art was not the constructed or imagined or synthetic unity of Western art but was an external symbolic manifestation of the perception of an inward spiritual unity.[1] Foreign critics have also referred to the psychic element in Persian and Indian art. According to Aurobindo, the psychic character of Persian art is redolent of the magic of the middle worlds but the psychic feature of Indian art is only an instrument for the transmission of a spiritual vision.[2]

The ancient world is famous for its sculptural achievements because sculpture was conceived in those days against the background of a great architecture.[3] Egypt, Greece and India were predominant in this field. "Medieval and modern Europe produced nothing of the same mastery, abundance and amplitude."[4] Indian sculpture represents the external portrayal of the greatness of the spirit and therefore it was doing the same thing which the Upanishads and the Vedanta did in the field of metaphysics and the Ramayana and the Mahabharata in the field of literature. Both Egypt and India had long centuries of successful sculptural achievements, compared to which the Hellenic sculpture, from the greatness of Phidias through the soft self-indulgence of Praxiteles to its decline, is a comparatively short period. In spite of Angelo or Rodin, later Europe was not very successful in the realm of sculpture.[5] Sculptural art

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *The Significance of Indian Art* (Bombay, 1947), pp. 36-8.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 101. Aurobindo discovers indications of "a profound revolution in the direction of an ever-deepening subjectivism" in the fields of modern art, music and literature of the world. *The Human Cycle*, p. 33.

[3] *The Significance of Indian Art*, p. 56.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] Sri Aurobindo, *The Significance of Indian Art*, p. 58.

requires the qualities of firmness, nobility and severity. Indian sculpture is the "self-expression of the spirit and ideas of a great nation". The first stage of Indian sculpture occupied by the pre-Asokan, Asokan and other later works shows a remarkable spiritual power and vigour. The magnificent statues of the cave cathedrals and the Pallava and other southern temples show great grace, strength and beauty. In Bengal, Nepal, Java and also in the Deccan one finds some remarkable specimens of fine sculpture but after that begins a period of decadence. Aurobindo does not accept the theory that India has borrowed from Greek art in the post-Christian era, and is severely critical of the "bastard Gandharan sculpture" which suggests an inefficient attempt of the Hellenic mind to absorb the spiritual trend of Indian culture.[1]

Even in the realms of architecture and painting we find the same attempt at visual manifestation of the spirit.[2] The great temples of the north show a "fine blending of opposites which is in the very spirit of the Indian religious, philosophical and aesthetic mind".[3] The colossal and massive temples of the south are only the architectural manifestation of the Infinite[4] and they "are the signs, the architectural self-expression of an ancient and spiritual culture".[5]

The greatness and aesthetic achievement of Indian art can be realized only if looked at from the perspective of Indian spirituality and its canons. Any external comparison with the Parthenon would not be accurate. The religious element is always prominent in Indian art and even in later times we find

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 17; *Views and Reviews* p. 72; *Kalidasa*, p. 12. Havell and Coomaraswamy refer to the decadence of the Gandhara art but V.A. Smith, *A History of Fine Art in India and Ceylon* (Oxford, 1911), p. 129, commends their aesthetic and technical qualities.

[2] For discussions of the nature of painting by Hindu writers, see Vatsyayana's *Kamasutra*, Yasodhar's commentary on *Kamasutra* (for reference to the *Sadanga* of painting), the *Vishnu-Dharmottaram*. Also A.K. Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art* (London, 1927), *Transformation of Nature in Art* (Harvard, 1934); E.B. Havell, *Indian Sculpture and Painting* (London, 1908).

[3] *The Significance of Indian Art*, p. 45.

[4] Sometimes the massiveness of the Dravidian temple architecture is criticized. But according to Aurobindo they give the impression of a teeming inexhaustible plenitude.

[5] *The Significance of Indian Art*, p. 31. For details of Indian architecture see James Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* (London, 1910), 2 vols; *Cave Temples of India* (London, 1880); J. Burgess, *Ancient Monuments, Temples and Sculptures of India* (London, 1897), 2 vols; E.B. Havell, *Ancient and Medieval Architecture of India* (London, 1915).

that Shaivism gave a powerful impetus to the plastic arts.[1] Even the Indo-Saracenic art could not escape the contagion of Indian spirituality and the Taj Mahal, the great mosques and tombs and the buildings at Fatehpur Sikri demonstrate a subtle feeling of immaterial charm. The Mughal school of painting also, despite its trends towards externalism, shows a transforming spiritual touch.[2] The criticisms levelled against Indian art often proceed from the acceptance of different and alien kinds of artistic criteria but if Indian art is analyzed and understood in its own spirit and background, it "need fear no comparison with any other, ancient or modern, Hellenic or Egyptian, or the Near or the Far East or of the West in any of its creative ages".[3]

Aurobindo thus finds the manifestation of the spiritual national soul of India in the realms of art and politics, society and intellectual culture, and in each of these spheres he attempts to show that not only are the basic trends dominated by the spiritual impulse but also that the resort to the spirit has led to great and powerful creative accomplishments.[4] The main task of his philosophy of history has been twofold. First, the philosophic demonstration of history as the field for the externalization of the spirit, not for the purpose of self-consciousness as indicated in German idealism but for the sake of creative delight and a taste of terrestrial adventure. Secondly, the refutation of the general charge that the emphasis on the spiritual side of life and history led to the enervation of the Indian race and consequently to its fall and decline. His thesis has been that behind the achievements of the Indian people in the material, vital, political, artistic and social fields there has been a predominant spiritual impulse and force. Whenever it has appeared that the cultivation of spiritual force leads to decline, it has only seemed so. Force is inherent in spirit. Creation is the externalization of this force and therefore if the East lay prostrate it was because it did not aim to infuse fully the spiritual power in mundane realms, and also sometimes because it neglected the dynamic

[1] *Views and Reviews*, p. 43. Cf., W. Cohn, *Indische Plastik* (Berlin, 1921).
[2] *The Significance of Indian Art*, pp. 101-2.
[3] Sri Aurobindo, *The Significance of Indian Art*, pp. 64-5.
[4] A concise statement of Sri Aurobindo's views on art in general and Indian art is given in C.C. Dutt, "Sri Aurobindo and Art" and "Sri Aurobindo and Indian Art" in *Sri Aurobindo Mandira Annual* (1947), pp. 134-9, and pp. 76-88 (1948).

side of the spirit and concentrated only on its contemplation. Since the world is the cosmic manifestation of the dynamics and will of the absolute spirit, it means that cultivation of political and social aims and objectives does not have to be neglected. Hence it is that Aurobindo condemns the world-negating tendencies of some forms of Vedantism and Buddhism and preaches a fullness of social and individual living. Therefore we find that the optimistic note of dynamism and activism is strong in his philosophy of history.

5. NATURAL DETERMINISM IN HISTORY

Akin to the theory of spiritual determinism, we find in Aurobindo the idea of determinism of nature. Since by the word nature he does not mean a material ultimate force, there is no logical contradiction in his acceptance of spiritual determinism as well as natural determinism in history. Nature in its essence is the spiritual self-power of God for multiple self-becoming. It "develops infinite primal qualities of becoming in the inwardness of things and turns them into an external surface of form and action".[1] Hence nature is only an outward executive aspect of the universal spiritual force.[2] There is an inherent consciousness-force in the absolute and this supreme principle of dynamics has a transcendent, a universal and an individual aspect. The universal aspect is concerned with cosmic creation. Nature is therefore only the seer-will, the knowledge-force of the Conscious-Being "at work to evolve in force and form all the inevitable truth of the Idea into which it has originally thrown itself".[3] Nature begins and acts with force,[4] and creative will is only an aspect of force. Aurobindo has a very comprehensive conception of nature and includes man's mentality under nature as its part.[5] Man's mentality "is . . . Nature partly become

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita, Second Series* (Arya Publishing House, Calcutta, 1942), p. 115.

[2] Sri Aurobindo, *The Mother*, p. 40. [3] *The Life Divine*, vol. I, p. 155.

[4] Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Part II, "Advent", 1950, p. 92.

[5] It seems that under the concept of Nature Aurobindo includes (*i*) nature as the spiritual dynamic force of God, (*ii*) nature in the sense of physical nature and (*iii*) the psychological conception of nature as human nature. With reference to the physical conception of nature he says: ". . . something of Girnar and the

conscious of her own laws and forces, conscious of her struggle of progression and inspired with the conscious will to impose a higher and higher law on her own processes of life and being".[1] There is a realm of *Karana Jagat*, which is beyond the subtle sphere. It is the world of types and causes where Nature arranges everything before she works it out in the visible world.[2] The aim of the cycles of nature is the temporal revelation of the eternally self-aware and self-revealed spirit contained, involved and imprisoned in the apparent inconscience of the material universe. Since there is in nature a secret universal impulse for the quest of the spiritual reality, therefore an incipient implicit impulsion towards some entire awareness and delight and power can always be discovered in nature. Evolutionary nature is a totality of inter-penetrating, ascending aspects of being which exercise the power of mutual modification. These large numbers of intermediate centres of force and consciousness create difficulties in the path of individual ascent from the inconscience to the spirit. It is clear that by nature as a divine power or *Para Prakriti* Aurobindo does not mean an indeterminate original cosmic substance or *Prakriti* constituted by the stuffs of inertia, kinesis and synthesis, as propounded by the Samkhya school, but takes it to be a power of the supreme spirit. "In its supreme status the Spirit is the supreme Conscious Being, Purushottama, and the Conscious Force is his supreme Nature, Para Prakriti. In each status of the gradations of Nature, the Spirit takes a poise of its being proper to that gradation; in Mind-Nature it becomes the mental being, in Life-Nature it becomes the vital being, in nature of matter it becomes the physical being.[3]

There is a will and design in nature and this *telos* finally contretizes itself.[4] A subconscient blind will, a mute idea, which "contains beforehand the form it is going to create"[5] and is "aware of a necessity other than the environmental"[6] can be

rocks and the hills, something of the voice and puissance of the sea that flings itself upon those lands, something of that humanity which seems to be made of the virgin and unspoilt stuff of Nature." Sri Aurobindo, *Bankim-Tilak-Dayananda*, pp. 39-40.

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 174.

[2] Sri Aurobindo, *The National Value of Art*, p. 9.

[3] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 68. [4] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 352.

[5] *Ibid.* [6] *Ibid.*

discovered in nature. Behind external appearances there is an internal necessity. In the process of historical manifestation nature brings in a series of intellectual and spiritual movements to revivify a failing and decaying organism.[1] The history of India provides many illustrations of this type of rejuvenation. Nature has some vital and immanent aims, and that segment of humanity which best serves them will survive in the struggle for mastery in the processes of a flexible civilization. All those "who can best help as liberating and combining forces, best make for adaptation and adjustment and for deliverance of the hidden sense of the great Mother in her strivings",[2] have the fittest chance for survival. In place of the biological power of survival in the struggle for existence through a process of natural selection, we find Aurobindo putting the primary emphasis on the spiritual and mental capacity to understand the teleology of evolutionary nature and to co-operate in her strides and advances.[3]

There may be a large number of subsidiary ends and objectives in the mechanism of nature but it is mindful only of the principal end. Sometimes it is tired of an age-long inertia and immobility and social conservatism. Then it brings forth a colossal degree of energy and dynamism in the process of whose effective operation some of the beautiful treasures of mankind may be lost, but so long as it succeeds in accomplishing the central task it does not care for the amount of destruction.[4] At times destruction is inevitable for a successful new birth and creation. "There are times in a nation's history when Providence places before it one work, one aim, to which everything else, however high and noble in itself, has to be sacrificed."[5] Such a critical moment appeared in Indian history at the beginning of the liberation movement in the first decade of the present century. Since evolution is proceeding out of inconscience the methods and instruments which nature has to use are not purely ethical and refined. For example, the present balance of political and economic power in the world is the work of

[1] *The Human Cycle*, p. 237. [2] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 50-1.

[3] See also the Chapters "The Determinism of Nature" and "Beyond the Modes of Nature" in Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita*. The Gita pleads that only the apparent self or desire soul is constituted by nature while the eternal soul rises superior to nature and her three *gunas*.

[4] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 113. [5] Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, pp. 4-5.

improvisations, diplomatic bargaining and treaties often arrived at by resort to military force. An application of ethics to politics has been the exception rather than the rule. But even through these rough and unideal methods "certain ends of the World-Force in its development"[1] have been served. Perhaps some degree of success has been obtained in bringing humanity a little closer at the cost of great suffering, persecution and violence. But these means of action in politics and history have been justified in terms of the physical and biological necessity imposed on nature in course of her dealings with a mankind which is still emerging from material inconscience and has not been sufficiently mentalised and moralized to be completely immune to the influence of unregenerate vitalism. But nature is non-moral, and often uses immoral and amoral means for working out her business.[2] According to the philosophy of absolute idealism nature is neither constructed nor works on an ethical principle. According to Bradley and Bosanquet morality is an unique distinguishing feature of the human universe and is not an integral constituent of the ultimate reality. Ethics, according to Aurobindo, is created by man for adjusting himself to society, and therefore its canons are relative, limited and inadequate. The totality of natural phenomena cannot therefore be interpreted with reference to the human standards of right and wrong. To decipher an ethical meaning and purpose in the universe is an over-anxious attempt of the human mind to read itself and its criteria in the external processes of nature.

But although from the logical standpoint of metaphysics it could be stated that nature is not a moral entity and could use even immoral means for the realization of her aims, from the standpoint of political philosophy such conclusions can be very dangerous. We find this exemplified in Hegelian political thought. "In contemplating the fate which virtue, morality, even piety experience in history, we must not fall into the Litany of Lamentations, that the good and pious often—or for the most part—fare ill in the world, while the evil-disposed and wicked prosper. . . But in speaking of something which in and for itself constitutes an aim of existence, that so called well or ill-faring of

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 187.
[2] Sri Aurobindo, *The Riddle of This World*, pp. 80-1.

these or those isolated individuals cannot be regarded as an essential element in the rational order of the universes."[1] In spite of its advocacy of the idea that the state is the realization of concrete freedom, and in spite of its gospel of the rational and philosophic pursuit of art, religion and philosophy, the political philosophy of Hegel encouraged a perverse *Machtpolitik* in Germany. From the standpoint of politics, the greatest defect of Hegelian idealism is its un-ethical and anti-ethical character. On the basis of dialectics and logic it constructs the concept of an absolute which is supra-ethical, transcending the limited finite moral categories and canons of men. But the moment such a supra-ethical absolute is posited and the inference is drawn that the processes of the cosmos are not moral and that moral considerations are irrelevant in that connexion, one may draw further the very logical inference that even the processes of history and politics may be amoral, and amorality in politics always has as its necessary corollary, immorality. The social Darwinism of Gumplowicz and Ratzenhofer drew from Darwin's biology the conclusion that social processes and tensions are analogous to the struggle in nature and are equally the manifestation of force. Instead of supporting the objectivity of 'good' in politics on the basis of philosophic idealism, as Plato did in the *Republic*, German idealism, and to some extent even Bradley and Bosanquet, have sponsored social coercion, automatism and authoritarianism. This has been one of the most fundamental changes in the political implications of idealism during the course of its historical evolution in Europe. Aurobindo is very frank in his statements that nature or the cosmos exemplifies immoral orientations and he, like the absolute idealists, conceives of a supra-ethical reality; but in some other passages he conceives also of an absolute supra-rational good.[2] This dual standpoint about the relativism and the absolutism of ethical criteria persists throughout Aurobindo's thought. But since he also conceives of an absolute good he does not draw the blatant conclusions about *Machtpolitik* as his German prototypes have done.

Since nature, according to Aurobindo, is only the power of

[1] Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York, 1944), p. 34.
[2] *The Human Cycle*, Chapter XV.

the supreme omniscient reality it cannot be anything else than an all-wise creator. Hence one can only figuratively talk about the errors of nature.[1] What appear to be errors are only apparently so. Nature has a prefigured and predetermined rhythm[2] and all her actions in the universe are according to a pre-established harmony, as Leibnitz would say. Each step of nature has a meaning and an appointed function in the total economy of cosmic procession. Nature acts according to a plan and unless mankind is spiritually, morally and socially prepared for a specific course of action, it would not be led to that all of a sudden. Hence it is that nature has not yet consented to the realization of the gospel of universal peace and goodwill.[3] The creative urge in nature always fosters and prepares the necessary instruments of cosmic and historical action, and so from the mere standpoint of the past and present non-realization of a certain plan it cannot be said that it is impossible even for future actualization. There are infinite surprises in nature and often it appears that mankind has been suddenly overtaken with a vast cosmic imponderable force for which it had not been prepared, but all that is only the manifest externalization of her great designs. Therefore the achievement of a federated or a centralized world-empire must not be considered an impossibility. "...if that be her intention, she will suddenly or gradually create the necessary means and conditions....a new development of the unexpected out of the infinite surprises of Nature."[4] What to man seems surprising or unexpected is not so from the ultimate standpoint. Sometimes it has been said that history presents us with a series of astonishing events producing unforeseen and unexpected results. Often the trivial, the accidental and the insignificant assume colossal proportions. But if people could look beyond the superficial appearances to the substantial inward reality and find out its meanings and intentions, it would become plain that in nine cases out of ten men are mistaken in judging the course of future history and the real significance of God's will.[5] On the surface

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 112.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Essays on the Gita*, Part I, p. 45.
[4] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 81.
[5] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 40.

one can notice only the secondary rules and practical by-laws of nature while the great hidden laws which are all-determining lie behind.[1] There is, one can say, a natural law[2] for all creation which starts from an amorphous basis and proceeds by contraction, constriction and solidification into a tangible shape which becomes the foundation of a powerful and rich growth.[3] But in all the processes of dynamic flux, tension and mobility one can find "certain eternal principles or truths of being which remain the same and upon them as bedrock. . .our progress and perfection are compelled to take place."[4] Since Aurobindo accepts the theory of evolutionary progression he does not conceive of a static nature. There is a constant dynamic and upward progression in nature and even man does not represent the climax of that process.

But although Aurobindo accepts the principle of natural law we do not find him drawing therefrom any significant political implication. In the history of European political philosophy the concept of natural law has been immensely important. Since the rise of Stoic philosophy natural law was conceived as dictating certain morally binding laws of political behaviour. The doctrine received its classic exposition in this form at the hands of Thomas Aquinas. With the birth of the modern physics of Leonardo, Galileo and Newton, the concept of natural law was given a physical scientific content and political writers like Grotius, Althusius and Spinoza used it in this shape. Since the seventeenth century the social contract theorists and advocates of political resistance drew revolutionary conclusions from the concept of natural law which was given a modernized form in the shape of the concept of natural right. Until the devastating attacks on natural law made by Hume and Bentham, the political conclusion that any law or governmental system running counter to the dictates of natural law and natural right was invalid, was drawn and stressed in political thought and life. But it seems surprising that Indian political theorists and philosophers, some of whom like Tilak and Aurobindo have been deeply well-versed in western philosophical and

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 1.
[2] *Ibid*, p. 131.
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 173.

political literature, did not base their theory of political resistance on any concept of natural law.[1]

In nature, according to Aurobindo, one can find an interplay of opposite and contradictory forces which are later harmonized and reconciled. That there must be a reaction to every manifestation of force and pressure is both a philosophical necessity and a fact constantly observed and experienced. "For Nature works by a balancing system of interplay of opposite forces."[2] When a particular trend has been dominant for some time, nature brings into operation the opposite tendency. If, in politics, for some time, centralization has been emphasized, then for some time the reverse trend of decentralization would become important. Similarly the tendency of political uniformity can be balanced by political multiformity. "The result need not be an equipollence of the two tendencies, it may be any kind of compromise, or instead of a compromise it may be in fact a fusion and result in a new creation which shall be a compound of both principles."[3] Because of his absolutist metaphysical foundations Aurobindo also talks of a larger and higher reconciling consciousness. When with the dawn and descent of a more integral power, larger supramentalized faculties begin working within the process of evolution, the opposite and mutually struggling ideals and ideologies sponsored and put forward by human reason, would be "harmonised and even reconciled because in their origin they are eternally one".[4] The notion of a play of opposite forces and their reconciliation seems like the Hegelian-Marxian dialectic. But we do not find in Aurobindo the theoretical specification of the thesis, the antithesis and the synthesis nor do we get in him the three dialectical laws of the transformation of quantity into quality, the interpenetration of opposites and the negation of the negation. In dialectical philosophy, since its origin in Greece and its development

[1] Chittaranjan Das defends resistance to an unjustified and coercive law on the grounds of natural law. He says: ". . . as soon as you have recourse to it [law and order] not to establish and defend the rule of law, but to destroy and attack it there is no longer any obligation on us to respect it, for a Higher Law, the natural law, the law of God, compels us to offer our stubborn resistance to it." Presidential speech of C. R. Das at the Gaya Session of the Indian National Congress, 1922, P. C. Ray, *Life and Times of C. R. Das* (Oxford, 1927), p. 264.

[2] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 310-1. [3] *Ibid.*

[4] *The Human Cycle*, p. 141.

through scholasticism and German idealism, the fundamental insistence is on struggle and tension, although the ideas of synthesis and reconciliation are also referred to. Aurobindo is primarily a philosopher of synthesis and harmony and integration. For him there is a dialectical interplay of forces but it also consummates in a final harmony. Therefore, instead of emphasizing the dialectics of the cosmic and historical progression, he insists on a technic and methodology to realize the gnostic community, whose basic principles would be mutuality and harmony.

Behind the social and political philosophy of Aurobindo there is a very strong foundation of the theory of the determinism of nature. He gives several examples from history. It was in the plan of nature that Europe should be united but the *Pax Romana* failed to provide unity in spite of the organized Roman empire. But what the Roman empire could not do had to be done by nature herself by providing the vision of the medieval Christendom loosely organized under the aegis of the Church.[1] Another example of the determinism of nature is provided in the history of the British people. The peculiar historical forces that have manifested themselves in the process of the expansion, settlement and organization of the British colonial system have been indeed so logical that it appears that "this Empire has throughout been intended and prepared by Nature in her workings to be the great field of experiment for the creation of this new type in the history of human aggregates, the heterogeneous federal empire."[2] A third example of this determinism of nature in history is the British invasion of and rule over India. For two thousand years the centripetal and centifugal tendencies had been struggling in India. Nature wanted to evolve in India a splendid and rich civilization on the basis of an unparalleled interplay of historical complexities and multiformities, but the plan failed. Hence "Nature had to resort to her usual *deux ex machina* denouement, the instrumentality of a foreign rule."[3] These three examples of medieval Christian unity, the British imperial system and the foreign rule over India indicate that there is an inevitablity and inexorability

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 47. [2] *Ibid*, p. 64. [3] *Ibid*, p. 10.

in the methods and mechanisms of nature. Political wisdom lies in recognizing the "inevitable will in nature"[1] and following her methods of operation. With reference to the consummation of human unity, Aurobindo says: "Let us create anyhow the framework, any framework of the aggregate; for she (nature) knows already the complete form she intends and will work out eventually in her own time by the power of the idea and our will to realise it, by help of strong force of circumstances, by pressure of all kinds, by physical force even, if need be, since that too seems still to be part of her necessary machinery; let us create it. Let us have the body, the soul will grow in the body."[2]

This concept of an inevitable will in Nature which has almost a self-concretizing force shows the resemblance of Aurobindo's political philosophy to Western political idealism. Hegel believed that the rise of a Teutonic Christian constitutional Prussian monarchy had been governed by the inevitable logic of the historical march of the *Welt-Geist*. Plato, of course, somewhat tones down the idea of the necessary realization of his best philosophical state by introducing an element of chance. With reference to the coming in of a philosopher-ruler he states: "But whether such an one exists, or ever will exist in fact, is no matter."[3] Even the materialist and atheist Marx, when borrowing dialectical logic from Hegel, took over the notion of inevitability and attributed to the forces of matter in motion as operating in history, the necessary power almost to effectuate the consummation of the classless society. Hegelian political idealism, when brought to England by Green, Bradley and Bosanquet, lost the implications of inevitability because it was partially modified with reference to the individualistic traditions of Benthamism and Ricardian economics. But in Aurobindo the concept of determinism is very strong.[4] He believes that the renaissance of India is inevitable. He also believes that a world union is inevitable.

There are some minor modifications of the concept of determinism when Aurobindo introduces the idea of fortune as a

[1] *Ibid*, p. 353. [2] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 353.
[3] Plato, *The Republic*, IX, p. 594.
[4] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 355: ". . . there is nothing that can be set down as impossible in the chances of the future, and the urge in Nature always creates its own means."

force in politics. For example, he says that a union of the world by force would imply not only the existence of invincible military and technological superiority, successful diplomacy, but with all that "an invincible good fortune".[1] The theory of fortune as a political force was also emphasized by the Renaissance political writers in Europe, especially in Italy.[2]

There have been several types of deterministic philosophies in the world. The earlier form of it one finds in fatalism. The Greek theory of the *Moira* which controlled both the gods and men, the Muslim idea of Kismet, the Hindu concept of Karma in its popular form and the Calvinist philosophy of predetermination are examples of determinism. In a half-philosophical and predominantly theological form we find this determinism in St. Augustine, Dante, Bonald, De Maistre as well as in the Puranas. This theological determinism refers to the decrees of an omnipotent deity, realizing themselves even by transcending our ordinary notions of cosmic or mechanical causation. The teleological determinism of Aristotle emphasizes the realization of some basic goals and objectives immanent in the genesis and structure of objects themselves. The Greek atomists like Democritus and Epicurus stress the determinism of nature. The rise of modern physics repudiated the Aristotelian cosmological theory of a prime mover imparting motions to celestial and terrestrial spheres in succession, and put forward the notion of inexorability in the march of the forces and constituent stuffs of nature. This scientific determinism, crystallizing under the impact of Newtonian physics, has long held the field. Some modern physicists like Eddington have interpreted Heisenberg's notion of the uncertainty of the behaviour of nuclear particles to imply the abandonment of determinism from science. But suffice it to mention that Heisenberg's theory applies to a very specific realm and does not banish the theory of universal determinism.

Aurobindo's theory of determinism has several significant implications.[3] He repudiates the explanation of the cosmos in

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 354.

[2] E. Cassirer, *The Myth of the State* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1945), pp. 156-62; N. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Chapter VII.

[3] Aurobindo, *Letters: Second Series*, p. 56: "I do not think that these arguments of Planck carry us very far."

terms of an inconscient and inconsequent force which in the process of its random operations without any determining principle, has caused all determinations and controls all facts and phenomena. There is too much of law and order in the world to allow credence to a theory of random action leading to persistent order. He also repudiates the explanation of the world by a mechanical necessity in things operating through mechanical laws. The notion of either an extracosmic transcendent or an omnipresent ruler-divinity imposing the mathematical artistry visible in the universe is also unsatisfying to him. According to his spiritual metaphysics, behind the operations of the material energy there is the luminous superconscient involved in apparent inconscience for the purpose of cosmic manifestation. What appears to be the work of a mechanical necessity is the imperative self-execution of the power of consciousness of the supreme being. It is thus that we find almost a mathematical design and execution in the universe. Therefore, the determinism in the historical and political processes that follow from the inevitability of the execution of the will of nature is really the certitude and invincible force with which the spiritual reality realizes its creative delight of mutation and multiplicity in the cosmos and in human history. Since nature or Prakriti is only the dynamically executive agent and power of the supreme reality, it is not to be supposed that any antagonism could exist between spiritual determinism and scientific natural determinism. Because nature, according to Aurobindo, is really a spiritual power, we find him referring to nature in its theological form of Mother, the Goddess that has to be worshipped and propitiated for bringing about effective social and political action. By a concentrated worship or devotion one man or a section of men can make his or their will and designs responded to by the Mother. Thus Aurobindo's determinism avoids appearing as a blind, iron inexorability, as we find enunciated in social scientists like St. Simon, Comte and Schäffle. He suffuses his philosophical ideas with the exalted emotion of a mystic. Since he had also been a revolutionary fighter in the cause of India's freedom his constant references to the determinism of Mother or nature do not seem like mere sentimental effusions. We find such determinism with reference to politics also in Tilak

and Gandhi. Despite their immense and constant activity in the cause of Indian independence both Tilak and Gandhi were believers in a spiritual determinism. Both of them constantly referred to the will of God, but they were never tired of calling on the country to prepare itself for the highest sacrifice. Though not as strong as in Tilak and Gandhi, we also find in Subhas Bose, who was inspired by Vivekananda and Aurobindo, the idea of worshipping Kali who would impart the necessary strength for political work.

6. THE ROLE OF IDEAS IN HISTORY

One of the persistent themes in political and social philosophy is the role of ideas in human history. The idealists tend to exalt moral and spiritual ideas. They feel that if only man could be imbued with the 'true' ideas, salvation would dawn upon earth. On the other hand, hard and cold realists, Machiavellians and Hobbesians, have sung the glories of the cult of the 'stronger'. In three of his books on political and social philosophy—*The Ideal of Human Unity*, *The Human Cycle* and *Ideals and Progress*—Aurobindo has attempted to deal with this very important problem of the place of ideas in human history and society.

Being a supramental idealist and a believer in Real-Idea[1] Aurobindo accepts the great role of ideas and ideals in human history. Ideals are only ethical and utopian ideas; otherwise from the ontological standpoint they are similar. All ideas are forces and they have a formative and self-realizing nature. Although this capacity for self-concretization can sometimes be reduced almost to nothing when the ideas have to struggle with inconscient matter, nevertheless the ideas are great potential forces. The comprehensive unitary Real-Idea, by self-variation and self-projection gets proliferated into a multiplicity of ideas, and since the Real-Idea is the supramental consciousness-force each one of these multiple ideas assumes the character of independent Idea-Forces. Since the Supermind is the vast all-comprehending and all-containing consciousness, the ideals, the wills or the forces do not collide with each other

[1] *The Life Divine* (American Ed.), p. 257.

because the supramental power harmonizes them.[1] At times there may be a dialectical antagonistic tussle between the different ideas but that is only a part of the supreme mechanism of the spirit itself for purposes of cosmic advance and progression. "From our ascending point of view we may say that the Real is behind all that exists; it expresses itself intermediately in an Ideal which is a harmonised truth of itself; the Ideal throws out a phenomenal reality of variable conscious-being which, inevitably drawn towards its own essential Reality, tries at last to recover it entirely whether by a violent leap or normally through the Ideal which put it forth. It is this that explains the imperfect reality of human existence as seen by the Mind, the instinctive aspiration in the mental being towards a perfectibility ever beyond itself, towards the concealed harmony of the Ideal, and the supreme surge of the Spirit beyond the ideal to the transcendental."[2] Only when the vital aspects of life have been divinized and transfigured can there be an unadulterated realization of the great ideals which, although expressed through human mind, are divine in their source.[3] But the delay in the realization of the great ideals does not mean that they are to be neglected as the empty day-dreams of an utopian idealist because "the utopian thinker is the individual mind forerunning in its turn of thought the trend which the social mind must eventually take".[4] Because ideals are the forecasts of basic trends of cosmic progression, in the ultimate analysis individuals are only the agents in whose mind they have got crystallized and finalized rather than generated. The immense role of great ideals behind human growth and progression is a consequence of their cosmic origin.[5] The realist and the conservative too often dismiss the idealist but history shows that even Napoleon, whom Hegel calls "the *Welt-Geist* on horse-back," was a colossal dreamer building plans and dreaming about Alexandrian

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, vol. I, pp. 154-7.

[2] *The Life Divine*, vol. I, p. 141.

[3] Cf. ". . . for that pre-existence in the divine knowledge is what our human mentality names and seeks as the Ideal."

[4] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 226.

[5] According to Aurobindo ideals are the sap of life. "They exercise a powerful influence, but it is indirectly, more by throwing their ideas into life which does with them what the secret will in it chooses, than by a direct and successfully ordered action", *The Human Cycle*, p. 135.

expansionist adventures.[1] All great changes express their advent through ideals expressed either by one individual or through a number of individuals, and society through increasing self-consciousness is driven towards their realization. But sometimes there may be confusion and distortion because of the difficulty of inducing the masses to follow great ideals.

Closely interconnected with the concept of ideals is the concept of idea.[2] Different theories have been prevalent about its genesis. Empiricism refers ideas to the experiences of the subjective percipient. *Apriorism*, as in Kant, emphasizes the role of certain spatio-temporal intuitions and the categories of the understanding in the systematization of ideas. A theologian attributes ideas to the action of God and in some of its forms this theory led to the Occasionalism of thinkers like Malebranche. The school of *Wissenssoziologie* founded and formulated by Durkheim, Max Scheler and Karl Mannheim would emphasize the social genesis of ideas. According to Marx and Engels ideas and ideals are "pictures of real things" or the "transformation and translation in the human mind" of the material world. Aurobindo attributes a metaphysical origin to ideas because they originate, according to him, in the Real-Idea and are harmonized thereby. Unlike the empiricists, the apriorists and the sociologists, he has no detailed epistemology. His conception of ideals and ideas is derived intuitionally from his basic metaphysical assumption about the creative power of the supermind.[3]

In the social and political philosophy of Aurobindo the role of ideas is very significant. "It is the idea which expresses itself in matter and takes to itself bodies. This is true also in the life of humanity; it is true in politics, in the progress and life of a nation. It is the idea which shapes material institutions. It is the idea which builds up and destroys administrations and govern-

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *Ideals and Progress* (Pondichery, 1951), p. 12.

[2] *Ideals and Progress*, p. 2: "The Idea is not a reflection of the external fact which it so much exceeds; rather the fact is only a partial reflection of the Idea which has created it. Certainly, ideals are not the ultimate Reality, for that is too high and vast for any ideal to envisage; they are aspects of it thrown out in the world-consciousness as a basis for the workings of the world-power."

[3] There is a reference to the concept of 'Idea-truths' which pour down into the human consciousness when there is the contact with the higher planes of being. See *The Riddle of This world*, p. 51.

ments."[1] Hence even when it may not have any tangible physical power the idea has a great force attached to it. Since an idea is impalpable it has great power,[2] and the results it brings about are staggering. The idea finds out the necessary means and instruments and conquers all impediments and does not rest content until it has expressed and established itself in permanent concrete forms.[3] But when the idea is false or only a half-truth or temporary truth, as for example the ideas of absolutism, aristocracy and theocracy, then it would not be permanently established in the course of history. In every idea one can find "a mastering will for self-fulfilment".[4] Hence at times Aurobindo speaks of "*idées-forces*". Reason provides "the great ideas that are forces (*idées-forces*), ideas which in their own strength impose themselves upon our life and compel it into their moulds".[5] The ideas descend from a supramental plane where consciousness and force, will and the dynamic potency to concretize the will, are not separated. Hence only the human forms of the ideas are subjective but in their essence they have both a foundational aspect of spiritual being and a dynamic aspect of becoming. Since human intellect and reason proceed and work upon division, limitation and exclusiveness we sometimes find contrary and antithetical ideas whose integration assumes a difficult appearance. Therefore at the political level, for example, we have the task of reconciling authority and liberty, socialism and individualistic democracy, beauty and truth, self-abnegation and self-fulfilment. But they cannot be fully reconciled unless there is the descent of some higher integralizing force and consciousness.

The theory of ideas as forces, as advocated by Aurobindo, has a remarkable similarity to the theory of the French sociologist Alfred Fouillee. Aurobindo even uses the French phrase *idées-forces* which he has possibly borrowed from the French sociologist. Although, according to Aurobindo, the Vedic concept of *Tapas* and the Upanishadic concept of *Ikshana* have provided him with the fundamental idea that consciousness and force are ultimately the same and every will has an aspect of force, yet the method for the theoretical conceptualization and

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, pp. 111-2. [2] *Ibid.* [3] *Ibid.*
[4] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 228. [5] *The Human Cycle*, pp. 140-1.

exposition of his *idées-forces* has a remarkable similarity to the theories of the French writer. Fouillee (1838-1912) set forth his ideas first in *La Science sociale contemporaine* (1880) and expounded them in later books like *L'Evolutionisme des idées-forces* (1906), *La Morale des idées-forces* (1908) and *La Psychologie des idées-forces* (1910).[1] According to Fouillee ideas once generated become forces and tend to express themselves in action. In his definition of ideas he also includes desires. Aurobindo also included will as a dynamic factor in his concept of supramental consciousness. Fouillee states that ideas have power only to the extent of their "objective possibility" and the amount of truth they contain. An idea becomes true not because of its force but it has power only to the extent that it is true. Ideas are not passive reflections of the social and material reality but are dynamic goads to action. "Everywhere the 'idea' appears as a power which contains in itself the conditions for a change of consciousness and, thanks to a correlation of psychical processes with cerebral movements, the conditions for a change of cerebral processes themselves. . . . Ideas compose the collective force stored up in an individual, they have their own intellectual heredity which reacts on biological heredity and often, through education, may direct and sometimes even dominate it."[2] Fouillee thought that with his concept of *idées-forces* he had reconciled the traditions of metaphysical idealism (especially of the German school) and the sociological outlook of modern positivist science. In the case of Aurobindo we find that he is a metaphysician of the Vedantic type who is trying to integrate the older Upanishadic idealism with the conclusions of modern Science. The concept of the self-concretizing force of will is much older in Indian thought than in the researches of the Hegelians and Bergson. In the metaphysics of dependent origination, *Pratitya-samutpada*, we find Buddha stating that the desire to take birth, *Bhava*, creates the necessary situations and circumstances for physical birth. Nonetheless it remains true that both in the Vedic-Upanishadic concepts of *Tapas* and *Ikshana* and the Buddhist concept of *Bhava*, the problem of the relationship between

[1] Augustin Guyaue, *La Philosophie et la sociologie d'Alfred Fouillee* (1913), summarized in H. E. Barnes (ed.) *An Introduction to the History of Sociology*, (Chicago, 1948), p. 462.

[2] Quoted in Barnes, *op. cit*, pp. 461-2.

will and action was discussed either on a cosmic or a psychological level. Aurobindo is discussing it also on the level of politics, history and sociology, and in this type of work, modern Western social sciences could possibly have given him some inspiration.[1]

The power behind an idea might be derived, according to Fouillee, from its truthful consonance to objective social possibilities or, according to Aurobindo, from its ultimate genesis in the Truth-Conscious Real-Idea. Anyhow both of them remained emphatic supporters of the theory that behind social processes and movements one can decipher the role of ideas. Aurobindo upholds that a great idea striving for social effectuation is a considerable power[2] and regardless of its apparent failure sometimes, it has to be taken into account when judging the total situation from a long-range historical perspective. The fundamental importance of ideas in history and society has also been stressed by Le Bon who says: "The only important changes whence the renewal of civilization results, affect ideas, conceptions and beliefs. The memorable events of history are the visible effects of the invisible changes of human thought."[3]

Regarding the process of the effectuation of ideas, Aurobindo holds that diverse techniques can be used. At times ideas "leap out as armed forces and break their way through the hedge of unideal powers".[4] The French Revolution, trying to undo the work of centuries in a few months, was one such catastrophic outburst. The great ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity wanted enshrinement in European history almost through the death-dance of Kali. At times ideas conquer by martyrdom, of which the heroic sufferings of the Christian and Sikh teachers provide memorable examples. Sometimes ideas "make interests their subordinate helpers, a fuel to their own blaze".[5] This relationship between ideas and interests has also been discussed by the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies who, apart from

[1] In the writings of De Roberty thought is regarded as a great energy that moves. De Roberty's theory coincides with the standpoint of A. Fouillee.

[2] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 314.

[3] Gutav Le Bon, *The Crowd* (London, 1913), quoted in H. E. Barnes (ed.) *An Introduction to the History of Sociology*, p. 488.

[4] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 148.

[5] *Ibid.*

the question of the ethical validity of ideas, stresses the view that the chances of the realizability of ideas are commensurate with the extent to which they express the real or supposed interests of powerful social groups, associations and parties. Being a realist in historical interpretation, Tönnies emphasizes the predominant role of social forces and interests and the subsidiary nature of ideas. But being an idealist, Aurobindo stresses the primary self-effectuating propulsive character of ideas which can at times use powerful social and political interests for their own purpose.

But the self-effectuating dynamics can be grasped only from the ultimate standpoint of the origin and end of ideas. In terms of the present-day constitution of humanity guided by emotional, egoistic and vital factors, ideas "have to work not only by a half-covert pressure but by accommodation to powerful forces or must even bribe and cajole them or work through and behind them".[1] Such compromises are bound to occur as long as a moral and spiritual transformation of mankind does not take place. Hence it is that even the rational and noble ideal of internationalism has to work through the concrete powers of such movements as nationalism, imperialism and state sovereignty.

From a long-range historical standpoint we find a great truth in what Aurobindo says with regard to the role of dominant ideas in history. Even in primitive societies we find that life is governed with reference to certain ideas which might have been infrarational and non-conceptual in their origin and formulation. Tylor, Frazer and Spencer have pointed out the great importance of myths in ancient society, which are a mass of ideas, judgments and representations.[2] The immensely dynamic role of ideas behind such religious movements as Buddhism, Christianity and Islam and such colossal historical outbursts as the French and Russian Revolutions cannot be negated. The German Nazis and the Italian Fascists made a calculated and deliberate effort to inculcate the Teutonic and Roman myths in the minds of the citizens before the latter could be induced to give up their lives in battle. It is true that we are selecting from history those movements that support the theory of the creative role of ideas. The critic would point out that the

[1] *Ibid.* [2] E. Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*, p. 23.

gigantic record of exterminations of peoples and nations, of catastrophic holocausts and destructions symbolized dramatically in, but not exhausted by, the record of two World Wars, are profound epitaphs on the noble ideas of the Ten Commandments, Buddha's sermon at Sarnath and Christ's Sermon on the Mount. He would draw the conclusion that in history not the *Geist* but the *Macht* is powerful. Once again the solution of this political and historical question depends on the solution of the fundamental metaphysical problem: which is ultimate, matter or spirit? If matter is ultimate and social consciousness is an epiphenomenon of social reality then the only way to get a better society is to change the social structure. Only those ideas have the power of doing this work which express the demands of the objective socio-economic forces. If, on the other hand, spirit is ultimate and ideas have an ultimate divine origin, then they would work with the vehemence of supraphysical forces and would get themselves concretely realized regardless of the impediments created by recalcitrant forces. Aurobindo accepts the latter view. In his drama *Perseus the Deliverer*, he refers to the battle between divine knowledge symbolized by Athene and blind power symbolized by Poseidon. The subject in this drama represents an incident in the passage of the human mind "from a semi-primitive temperament surviving in a fairly advanced civilisation to a brighter intellectualism and humanism",[1] ultimately attaining the fullness of its psychic and spiritual destiny. According to Aurobindo, the rule of blind forces, social interests, political segmental myths and constellations like pan-Germanism, pan-Islamism or pan-Americanism, or vitalistic aggressive chauvinism, is a phenomenon of unregenerate humanity. With the advent of a spiritualized society, ideals as divine realities pointing to the destiny of universal perfection would reign supreme.

But as long as that final spiritual destiny of man and society has not been consummated, history is going to be a kaleidoscopic pattern of alternate victories of ideas or forces. Sometimes Aurobindo forgets his metaphysics of the self-effectuating force of ideas derived from their genesis in the supramental conscious-force and begins to explain politics in terms of vital

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *Collected Poems and Plays*, vol. I, p. 174.

and material forces. Therefore we get a change and divergence in his metaphysical standpoint and his political philosophy. He says, in terms of almost absolute political realism: "Forces take the first place in actual effectuation, and moral principles, reason, justice only so far as forces can be compelled or persuaded to admit them or, as more often happens, use them as subservient aids or inspiring battle cries, a camouflage for their own interests."[1] This is one of the great problems of a spiritual philosophy of history: how to reconcile divine determinism and force? Sometimes it is possible to interpret the reign of force and terror in history as only the manifestations of the divine in an antithetical aspect. Sometimes it is possible to consider force as originating in the unreformed nature of man or sometimes it can be considered as a necessary mechanism in the spiritual dialectic of a cosmic manifestation. Aurobindo accepts this last solution. But if he had been content with explaining forces as only concretized formalized externalized ideas, as he could legitimately do on the basis of his metaphysics, the duality and contradiction which we find in his metaphysics and political philosophy could have been avoided. If ideas have a self-effectuating force then they have to be attributed the potency of dominating self-force, or it has to be asserted that in a battle between noble ideas and blind social and political forces ideas will win, at least ultimately and eventually. But sometimes Aurobindo makes a statement such as this: "Ideal conditions cannot be expected, for they demand a psychological clarity, a diffused reasonableness and scientific intelligence and, above all, a moral elevation and rectitude to which neither the mass of mankind nor its leaders and rulers have yet made any approach. In their absence, not reason and justice and mutual kindliness but the trend of forces and their practical and legal adjustment must determine the working out of. . .problems."[2] Here it appears that ideas are supposed to have lost their original self-dynamism and in spite of the fundamental acceptance of supramental metaphysics in Aurobindo's thought the problem is being discussed on a purely realistic sociological level. The only way Aurobindo can escape this contradiction between the self-actualizing potency of ideas and their occasional or some-

[1] *The Ideal Human Unity*, pp. 147-8. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 146-7.

times persistent socio-political ineffectiveness is to accept that even the impediments of material forces and the obstructions they put to the realization of ideas are also a part of the spiritual dialectic and it is the supreme design of the Real-Idea that its multiple ideas should fight with the various accumulated forces and political power and eventually triumph. However Aurobindo's optimism regarding the eventual victory of moral and spiritual ideas is unshakeable.

A comprehensive philosophy of history has to accept the creative role of ideas, but for the ideas to be effective social agents have also to take hold of the minds of people. The Hegelian-Aurobindian concept of the self-actualizing potency of ideas is difficult of acceptance. Some of the greatest moral and spiritual idealists and prophets have proved ineffective in history. The objective structure of social reality has also to be thoroughly scrutinized and taken into consideration. We should not be fanatical champions of ethereal ideas but should evolve a thought-pattern which accepts the efficacy of ideas commensurate with their consonance with the dominant trends of the historical structure. This implies the acceptance of the concept of organic interdependence between ideas and social reality.

7. RELIGION AND HISTORY

The problem of the origin, growth and influence of religions is one of the most important themes in the philosophy of history. Sporadic reflections on this problem we find in Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, Ibn Khaldun, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Vico and others. But systematic reflection on this problem is a product of two modern developments — the French rationalistic philosophy and the growth of the social sciences since the last quarter of the eighteenth century. In the attempt to assign the place of the historical religions as factors in the evolution of man, different theories have been advanced about the origin of religions. According to Hegel religion is "the consciousness of Absolute Being in general". Engels traced the roots of religion to the persistence of old savage beliefs and superstitions. Lenin found the roots of religion in the fear of the blind forces

of capital. The Marxist theory about religion being only an ideological superstructure bears the influence of Ludwig Feurbach's idea that man creates his own deity out of his own mind. Hauer considers ecstatic experiences to be the sources of religious experiences. Bergson distinguishes the intuitional and the institutional phases of religion, the first being primarily the individualistic and the second the social and historical aspect of religions. Anthropologists trace the origin of religion to clan or tribal solidarity and consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo points out three stages in the evolution and growth of religion.[1] The primitive stage might have been "a mass of animism, fetishism, magic,[2] totemism, taboo, myth, superstitious symbol, with the medicine-man as priest, a mental fungus of primitive human ignorance, — later on at its best a form of Nature-worship",[3] but it had also some basis in a crude unsystematized occultism.[4] Later on there appeared the second stage, the national or tribal religion. It adhered to a polytheistic belief and made some systematic attempt at the formulation of a cosmogony, cosmology, eschatology and also social ethics. Behind it lay a strong occult tradition and esoteric spiritual knowledge but its main factors were ritualistic sacrifices, tribal ethics and the vague beginnings of a spiritual philosophy. The mystic or the incipient occultist has everywhere been the creator of religion and even if the anthropological theory of the origin of religion in the "subconscious mass-mind" were to be accepted, it should be recognized that religious thought was formulated and inspired by the mystics and the occultists.[5] The third stage in the evolution of religion marked the emancipation of the spiritual experiences and gnosis and attempts were

[1] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, pp. 702-4.

[2] According to Frazer magic precedes religion. But according to Durkheim magic has sprung from religion and has borrowed its techniques from religion.

[3] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 702.

[4] Cf. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. I, p. 352.

[5] Durkheim regards religion as entirely a social thing. God is regarded as a symbolic expression of the social collectivity. But Aurobindo is emphatic on the point that it is the mystic or the incipient occultist who imposed his secret supraphysical discoveries arrived at by intuitions, on the mass mind in the form of belief, myth and practice. While Durkheim takes a sociological approach to the origin of religion in so far as he finds the roots of religious ideas and notions in group interaction, concentration and interstimulation, Aurobindo takes an individualistic approach because according to him "a mass experience or discovery or expression is not the first method of Nature". *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 703.

made not only to make the spiritual element the basis and kernel of religion but also to make that element universally available. If the second stage stressed esoteric discipline, the third prescribed a system of exoteric teaching.

This threefold evolutionary typology of religion as formulated by Aurobindo has some similarity to the Hegelian triad. Hegel gives two accounts of the evolution of religion — in *The Phenomenology of Mind* and *The Philosophy of Religion.* In *The Phenomenology of Mind* the chief divisions of religion are: (1) Natural religion at the level of consciousness, further subdivided into (*i*) religion at the level of sense-certainty — "light", as the Parsee religion, (*ii*) religion at the level of perception — "life", primarily the religions of India and (*iii*) religion at the level of understanding — primarily the Egyptian religion; (2) Religion in the form of art, at the level of self-consciousness; (3) Revealed religion or religion at the level of reason and spirit — Christianity.[1] Aurobindo's account does not bear much resemblance to this Hegelian account but it has close affinity with the second Hegelian version found in *The Philosophy of Religion.* The first stage, according to Hegel, is the stage of magic and natural religion. This corresponds to Aurobindo's primitive religion. The natural religions conceive God as a power or substance and there is no explicit consciousness of the importance of the individual. The second stage according to Hegel is marked by the emergence of religions of spiritual individuality in which God is looked upon as subject. We find examples of it in the religions of Judaea, Greece and Rome. In Judaism, the religion of sublimity, the deity is conceived as full of power and wisdom, as a dignified subjectivity; the Hellenic religion is one of beauty; the Roman religion is one of utility or of understanding and conformity to design. This stage corresponds to Aurobindo's national or tribal stage. The revealed absolute Christian religion establishes a reconciliation of God and the world. Christ or the God-man shows this unity. God is to be conceived as the self-externalizing (incarnate) Idea, which from this externalization eternally returns back into itself, i.e. as the triune God. This partly corresponds to Aurobindo's third stage or the

[1] Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind* (E.T. by J.B. Baiuie), pp. 682-785.

stage of religion with "the strong spiritual nucleus".[1]

Hegel tries to construct a *historical* typology which would simultaneously reveal also the *logical* development of the idea, but the weakest point in his philosophy of religion is that he had to leave out Islam altogether because historically it came later than the absolute religion of Christianity. Aurobindo's typology escapes this gap because his scheme is conceived in terms of a spiritual evolution and is not necessarily identical with the spatio-temporal evolution of the historical forms of religions. Hegel conceives of Christianity as the highest or the absolute religion. Aurobindo, though in his earlier writings he wrote in the most exalted terms about Hinduism as the perfect revealer of the subliminal depths and the superconscient heights, stated later on that the contents and dimensions of real gnostic supramental spirituality were not exhausted even by Vedic and Vedantic Hinduism. He therefore introduces a more liberal, tolerant and moderate note and does not appear as a nationalist trying to construct a scheme of religious philosophy to justify his own particular sect. Moreover, the basic principle in the Hegelian scheme is the conception of the deity whether as a power of nature or as spiritual individuality or as the self-externalizing idea eternally returning back into itself. In Aurobindo the dominant concept is the release and emancipation of the spiritual power from magic and inconscience and the attainment of the fullness of mystic supramental splendours. Hence, whereas Hegel's scheme appears theological, Aurobindo's scheme is metaphysical. Furthermore, according to Aurobindo there is the possibility that the primitive stage could have been "a fall or a vestige, a relapse from a higher knowledge belonging to a previous cycle of civilisation or the debased remnants of a dead or obsolete culture".[2] But Hegel considers the first stage to be one of the slumber of the spirit. There is no conception in him of the multiple cycles of creation and destruction (*Manvantara* and *Sarga*), which is an important theme of Hindu religious mythology. But Aurobindo might have derived the generalised notion of a triadic evolution from Hegel (because Hegel is the great formulator of this dialectical methodology) and clothed it in terms of his own spiritual conceptions and ideas. It is re-

[1] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 705.

[2] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 702.

markable that both Hegel and Aurobindo accept the origin of ethics in the second stage of religious evolution and they are alike also in their view that the first stage of religion is characterized by an affiliation with, or half-immersion into, nature. According to Aurobindo the attempt to universalize the spiritual element by means of exoteric teaching leads to the profanation of the mysteries and intellectual formalization of spiritual knowledge into dogma, and encourages the growth of rituals and cults. Thus, while according to Hegel the third stage of religion would be the highest, according to Aurobindo perhaps the purity of mystic spiritualism would be found in the second, although it is true that the philosophic foundations of spiritual knowledge are built in the third stage.

Religion has had a tremendous influence in course of history. Even the subconscious and vaguely realized intuitions of early man gave him a power and source of subsistence. He turned towards a dynamic utilization of the power of supraphysical beings whom he could contact and could obtain thereby some subliminal and supernormal experience. Behind the amorphous mixture of old intuitions, occultism and magic there can be discovered a religio-social ethical sense and even a dim mystic longing. While magic tended sometimes towards anti-social and egocentric individuality, religion tended to make men socially and collectivistically oriented. Therefore religious ethics and occult mysticism in ancient history produced the priests, the just men and the wise men referred to in the Vedic and Greek traditions, and created a powerful and dynamic culture in several countries. But the full efflorescence of the spiritual man is attained with the coming into prominence of the Yogis, saints and prophets who initiate the foundations of the spiritualized community and create the traditions of ethical and religious culture in the highest sense.[1] In modern times the rise of European rationalistic enlightenment and the impact of Galilean-Newtonian science have introduced the reign of a materialistic secularism and partly of atheism, first in Europe and then also in other parts of the world. But in the "older natural societies" the influence of religion was colossal.[2] In those days religion

[1] *The Life Divine*, (American ed.), p. 783.
[2] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 229.

could be equated with life and it governed almost all the departments of social and individual activity. In India and in Asia generally one can notice the great influence of religion. The all-comprehensive character of religion sometimes led to attempts to create state religions. "But a state religion is an artificial monstrosity, although a national religion may be a living reality."[1]

The different historical religions have made their specific contributions to human history. The old pagan polytheistic symbolism, although to the modern man it may appear only as an intellectualized animism, did contribute a sense of many-sided delight in life.[2] It emphasized the notion of a large, harmonious and extensively capable manhood. Christianity emphasized the vision of divine love and charity, but it failed to spiritualize Europe because its medieval patristic and scholastic forms, with their asceticism and dogmatic theological outlook, ran counter to the European emphasis on life and reason which had been left as legacies of the Graeco-Roman civilizations.[3] Since the Renaissance, therefore, one finds in the Occident an exhaustion and decline of religions because of an unholy war between intellect and spirit. The trium h of the intellect led to the growth of secularism, atheism and materialism. The rise of modern European culture has been marked by the growth of a ratiocinative and scientific philosophy; but there have also been, in ancient and medieval periods, some brilliant spiritual creations. Pythagoreanism, Stoicism and the medieval philosophy of the Franciscans are examples of this. Too great an emphasis on the purification of religion by reason has almost led to the death of the idea of spiritual power in European religion.[4] Perhaps Aurobindo's appraisal of the role of religion and of Christianity would not pass unchallenged by critics. Aurobindo would distinguish between the early moral and spiritual teachings of Christ and the apostles and the later politicization of Christianity after Constantine, and as he says "the victorious religion became a militant and dominant

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 229.

[2] Sri Aurobindo, *Thoughts and Glimpses* (Arya Publishing House, Calcutta, 1941), pp. 39-40; Sri Aurobindo, "A Defense of Indian Culture", *Advent*, 1948, p. 147.

[3] *Advent*, 1948, p. 145.

[4] Sri Aurobindo, "A Defense of Indian Culture", *Advent*, 1948, p. 152.

Church and a more fanatically persecuting power than the creed and the empire which it replaced".[1] Vivekananda also spoke harshly about the social and political role of Christianity. Dayananda, according to Rolland, had declared war on Christianity.[2] Gandhi, Ramatirtha, Vivekananda and Aurobindo only criticize the social and political repercussions of Christianity as a spiritual and religious movement; they have the highest regard for the lofty teachings and character of Jesus Christ. But Dayananda had slender regard for either. On the other hand, although Aurobindo is critical of the dearth of spirituality in Europe, he thinks that Christianity was a link in the transmission of some basic spiritual ideas like fraternity and humanitarianism from Indian Buddhism to the West.[3]

Buddhism, according to Aurobindo, preached a noble way to wisdom and purity. He repudiates the negativistic and nihilistic interpretations of Nirvana, of whose spiritual authenticity he claims to have personal experience.[4] He considers Buddha the most dynamic personality in the history of the world although he seriously condemns the exaggerated emphasis on negativism, asceticism and monasticism in later Buddhism. Along with Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and Gandhi, Aurobindo offers a positive interpretation of Buddha's teachings and like them wants to affiliate ancient Buddhism to Upanishadic Vedantism, with, of course, some conceptual variations.[5] The rise and growth of Indian nationalism has seen a pronounced growth of pride in the achievements of Buddhism in India and eastern Asia. Indian nationalism has immensely benefited from realizing the historical fact that even Japan which was the first to hurl the spirit and sword of defiance against Western imperialism got its Buddhism from India through China. The claim of India's

[1] *Essays on the Gita*, vol. I, p. 56.
[2] Romain Rolland, *The Life of Ramakrishna* (Mayavati, 1944), p. 150.
[3] Sri Aurobindo, *Ideals and Progress*, p. 60.
[4] A Peace, stupendous, featureless, still
Replaces all, — what once was I, in it
A silent unnamed emptiness content
Either to fade in the Unknowable
Or thrill with the luminous seas of the Infinite.

— Sri Aurobindo, *Collected Poems and Plays* (Sri Aurobindo Ashrama, Pondichery, 1942), vol. II, p. 298.

[5] V. P. Varma, "Sri Aurobindo's Interpretations of Buddhist Philosophy", *Journal of Bihar Research Society* (Buddha Jayanti Special Number), 1956.

spiritual fatherhood (especially with regard to eastern Asia) has been used in the services of Indian nationalism. Indian nationalism considered Christianity as only a modified form of Buddhism on the historically insubstantial and perhaps inadequate evidence that the sects of the Essenes and the Therapeutae in Palestine and Alexandria were Buddhistic groups powerfully influencing the genesis and teachings of Christianity.[1] Aurobindo also accepts that the Buddhist way of life powerfully influenced the birth of Christianity.[2] Judaism and Islam, according to him, taught man how to be religiously faithful in action and zealously devoted to God.[3] Hinduism, he thinks, opens the path for the profoundest religious experience.

Aurobindo is in favour of a comprehensive spiritual discipline which could integrate the experiences of different religions, because all of them have led mankind to some good. He would stand for something like Vivekananda's "Universal Religion".[4] But Vivekananda and also Ramakrishna taught that all religions were equally valid and efficacious methods of God-realization and hence they stressed that people should practise ethical and religious teachings and try to be better men. Aurobindo, on the other hand, does not merely say that one can get spiritual illumination by the devout practice of the ethical and mystical teachings of any of the religions but would want that "all these God-visions could embrace and cast themselves into each other".[5] This attempt at the spiritualization of mankind would involve prolonged efforts in the field of spiritual self-evolution. Aurobindo wants a spiritual fusion and creative harmonization of the teachings of the great religious leaders. Christ preached the gospel of purity and human perfection. Mahomed was insistent on surrender and obedience to God. Ramakrishna taught that all religions are true and he also enunciated the

[1] Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, pp. 158-63, p. 192; D. R. Bhandarkar, *Asoka*. The Therapeutae are equated with the Theraputras. Perhaps it may be too speculative to identifiy the Essenes with Sramanas.

[2] Vivekananda also accepted the indirect influence of Buddhism on Christianity, *The Complete Works of Vivekananda* (1945 ed.), vol. I, p. 389.

[3] Sri Aurobindo, *Thoughts and Glimpses*, pp. 39-40.

[4] *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Part II (Mayavati ed. of 1943), pp. 357-94.

[5] Sri Aurobindo, *Thoughts and Glimpses*, pp. 39-40.

concept of the divinity of man. Chaitanya stood for divine love and ecstasy. Aurobindo wants the "gathering" of all these streams into a "redeeming Ganges" for pouring over the "the death-in-life of a materialistic humanity".[1]

This comprehensive catholicity with regard to all religions and sects has been one of the main tenets of Indian political thought. Ram Mohan Ray was a man of wide tolerance and a keen student of comparative religions. Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and Aurobindo have stressed the existence of the same fundamental truth in all religions on the basis of mystic experience.[2] Gandhi thought all religions equal on the basis of the fact that the same lofty ethical idealism characterized all the great religions of the world. Dayananda was the only staunch iconoclast preaching the unmatched superiority of the Aryan Vedic creed. The idea of the equality of all religions, which has been given a spiritual and ethical foundation in modern Indian political thought, was necessary for Indian nationalism which had to appeal to a population professing different creeds and cults. There was thus a strong political implication behind the idea of the equality of all religions. Indian teachers like Vivekananda and Gandhi have claimed that they are going beyond the Western idea of tolerance which assumes an attitude of superiority of one's own religion but condescends "to tolerate" others. They teach not only the toleration of other religions but the cultivation of an attitude of reverence for all great religious leaders and scriptures. Indian nationalism has benefited from realising the historical truth that all the great religions of the world—Hindusim, Buddhism, Confucianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, arose in Asia. It has often been said that although the Europeans might have excelled in the realms of politics and intellect, the Asiatics excelled in the realm of spirit; even Gandhi at times used to refer to Jesus Christ as a great Asiatic.

Although Aurobindo is a mystic and a seer he is against the irrational prejudice of the ethical or religious mind in condemning all kinds of power. He thinks that every type of power is

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *The Yoga and Its Objects*, p. 34.

[2] *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. IV, (1945 ed.), p. 183: "He left every religion undisturbed because he had realised that, in reality, they are all part and parcel of the One Eternal Religion". ('He' refers to Ramakrishna.)

"spiritual in its origin and divine in its character"[1] and therefore he is critical of the illusionism, pessimism and acosmism of certain Indian philosophical and religious systems. As a man of historical vision he acknowledges that the old religious cultures declined because they had serious inherent defects.[2] They isolated and confined their action to the betterment of the individual but sometimes tolerated gross cruelty and barbarism in the social sphere. He also refers to the want of sufficient intellectual clarity in those cultures which could be used as an example for social experiment and political progress. He thinks that although the highest aim of man is to transcend the will to power, in the early stages of individual and social development the will to life and power should be exercized and exerted. The highest aim of man and society is to transmute the world's life and consciousness into the divine spirit. But this task which mankind seems to have set for itself since the beignnings of its early aspirations and speculations has not been consummated so far, because the dogmatic and rigidly credal and rational pursuits of theologies, religions and philosophies have failed to generate the necessary spiritual power.[3] The plethoric growth of churches and creeds and the sanctification of outworn social folkways, morals and customs have led to a "false socialisation of religion".[4] Instead of guiding and regulating society religion has become a function of social and political structures and processes, and therefore it has failed to redeem mankind. But Aurobindo makes a distinction between the spiritually oriented "true religion" and the credal ceremonial "religionism".[5] He is critical only of the latter. Being a believer in the supra-rational spheres of reality he would not stand for any purely rational religion which could only be a Voltairian deism[6] unavailable for the spiritual regeneration of society. Such a regeneration can only be achieved by bringing down the powers of God, "the infinite who is not an abstraction but a Being".[7]

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Part One, p. 154.

[2] *Evolution*, pp. 32-4.

[3] *The Yoga and Its Objects*, p. 34. According to Aurobindo, *Letters, Second Series*, p. 293, European atheism has been a reaction against a shallow exoteric religionism and its popular dogmatic creeds, formulas and catechisms.

[4] *The Human Cycle*, p. 279.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 220.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 165.

[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 160, 165.

Aurobindo's views on religion in its social aspects are fundamentally opposed to all the atheistical and psycho-analytical attempts to consider religion a stupefying opium or a rationalization of some unknown fear and prostration. On the other hand, he will not concur with the attempts of fanatics of different religions, for instance the French post-Napoleonic conservatives like De Maistre (with reference to Christianity), to make religion the basis of society. Radhakrishnan analyses the several substitutes for religion in our times—scepticism, atheism, agnosticism, humanism, socialism, pragmatism, etc., and thinks that they all indicate a craving for the eternal and the abiding. He therefore pleads for a 'religion of the spirit'.[1] Aurobindo's basic aim being a total transfiguration of man, he is not satisfied with a mere religious solution but wants the descent of the supramental powers for changing man's consciousness.

It is very difficult for me to make forecasts about the role of religion in the future history of mankind. By and large we find that religion is retreating to the inner world. The external spheres as are being left to the control of science, sociology, physiology and secularism. The great prophets are, on the other hand, preaching a return to the intimations of the hidden depths. I myself have no religious experience. But I believe it would be good for the individual and society if somehow religious truths could be proved to be really true. As a student of political and social philosophy I am keenly interested in the sociological and historical background and implications of religions. Religion is a great power and has tremendous potentialities for the social and moral regeneration of mankind. Hence I think that there is great wisdom in what Vivekananda, Dayananda, Tilak, Gandhi and Aurobindo have said about the moralization of our political life. In the name of mistaken secularism we are refusing to listen to the pregnant and vital message of our scriptures which teach the inner purification of our life and thereby aim to sanctify the structure even of the social and historical universe.[2]

[1] S. Radhakrishnan, *An Idealist View of Life*, chapter I, and pp. 309-10; *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, pp. 16-7; *Kalki* pp. 68-98; article in *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, p. 285.

[2] V. P. Varma, *Rajniti Aur Darshana* (in Hindi), last chapter.

8. WAR AND HISTORY

It would perhaps sound strange from a supramental gnostic and idealist philosopher to hear a defence of war in whatsoever form it may be but because Aurobindo is not a mere mystic but also a philosopher of history and culture he analyzes and examines the role of war in the evolution and development of man and society. First of all he creates a metaphysics defending force and violence. "Force created the world, force is the world, force by its violence maintains the world, force shall end the world, and eternally recreate it."[1] He almost defends the view of Heraclitus that war is an essential means to justice. There cannot be real peace in the world unless there is a balance of power between hostile forces or a mutual neutralization of the excesses. According to Heraclitus, "peace cannot create, cannot maintain anything, and Homer's prayer that war might perish from among gods and man is a monstrous absurdity, for that would mean the end of the world".[2]

Besides this philosophic defence of war there is also a historical approach to the problem. War has been a significant force in political evolution. War and militarism have been factors leading to political centralization by their emphasis on the concentration of power. Hence one finds that in the growth of powerful monarchies and aristocracies as well as in holding together centrifugal separatist forces war "has been the chief factor".[3] Aurobindo cites three historical examples.[4] The destruction of the Roman military patricians and the establishment of the empire saved Rome from a premature decline. The destruction of the British military and feudal lords in the Wars of the Roses led to the establishment of the strong Tudor 'New Monarchy' under Henry VII and others. The Mahabharata records the story of the destruction of the power of the Asuras and the conservation of the *Brabalahma* and *Kshatrabala*, and how this combination of spiritual and military power saved the country for a long time. In stating this historical defence of war as a political mechanism, Aurobindo resembles some of the

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *Heraclitus*, p. 39. [2] *Ibid.*
[3] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 204.
[4] Sri Aurobindo, *Gita Ki Bhumika* (in Hindi), pp. 88-9.

nineteenth century historical scholars who justified war by historical examples such as the creation of security by the Persian empire, Alexander's conquest of Persia and Egypt leading to the development of a cosmopolitan sentiment, the Roman conquests making journey safe from Western Europe to North Africa, England being united by the Wessex kings, Spain by Ferdinand and Isabella, Germany by Bismarck and America by Lincoln, all by means of war. Hegel had referred to war as the mechanism for the progression of the *Welt-Geist*, and German leaders and writers like Bernhardi, Moltke and Treitschke justified war.

In the course of his exposition of the views of the Gita with reference to violence Aurobindo stresses the inevitability of war in human life. War may be destructive of the bodily life of individuals but it is good for their inner life because it leads to the growth of nobility, courage and chivalry.[1] War and strife create heroism and the spirit of self-abandonment for the sake of some great cause; "without heroism man cannot grow in the Godhead—courage, energy and struggle are among the very first principles of the divine nature in action".[2] But modern historical scholarship and studies in the sociology of war would seriously refute this psychological defence of war by Aurobindo. A study of the motivation of war since the beginnings of the Egyptian, Sumerian, Semitic and Indo-European exploits and migrations, down to the warfare of Frederick, Napoleon and Bismarck, would show that the roots of war lie in the organized pursuit of political and economic interests. The growing mechanisation of war is making the cultivation of divine courage and heroism through it difficult, and people find themselves forced into battlefields by political and social agencies without their autonomous self-determining will ever being exercised. Moreover, sociologists have pointed out the immense growth of crime and other socially disorganizing and devious elements resulting from war.[3]

[1] *Essays on the Gita* (American edition), p. 47.

[2] *The Human Cycle*, pp. 205-6.

[3] Abbe de Saint-Pierre regarded war as an impediment to human advancement. Quincy Wright, *A Study of War*, 2 vols; *The Causes of War and the Conditions of Peace* (London, 1935); S. R. Steinmetz, *Soziologie des Krieges* (Leipzig, 1929); S. Dumas and K. Vedel-Peterson, *Losses of Life Caused by War* (Oxford, 1923); P. A. Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Dynamics* (New York ,1937), vol. 3, pp. 385-392.

Besides emphasizing the growth of divine heroism and courage in individuals, Aurobindo thinks that war has been "constructive of their inner life and of the ethical elevation of the race" and believes that only the fanatics of pacifism can deny the services rendered by war—the Indian ideal of the Kshattriya and the Japanese ideal of the Samurai.[1] But this historical-mystical conception of the "ethical elevation of the race" is a doubtful consummation. We know that the infiltration of the Kassites in Babylonia, of the Teutons and Slavs in Germany and eastern Europe, and of the Assyrians in Asia have spelt the coming of darkness and squalid ignorance. Aurobindo's reference to the 'inner elevation of the race by war' reminds one of the utterances of the pan-German militarists and Fascist dictators whose brutal attempts at the total extermination of the Hebrews would repel and horrify any student of human civilization. Even in the cases of the unification of Germany, Italy and America by war in the nineteenth century "the net gain", Johnson says, "appears greater because the values of the defeated party are not taken into the reckoning".[2] Aurobindo refers to Nietzsche's idea about the psychological growth of man; man to begin with is a camel-man, in the middle he is a lion-man and thereafter he is a child-man; and he says that Nietzsche's ideas save us from a "too mellifluous philosophic, religious or ethical sentimentalism which loves to look upon nature as love and life and beauty and good" and does not look into the fierce Rudra aspect.[3] But even Nietzsche felt that nationalism and war had grown anachronistic and advised people to become good Europeans.[4] Spencer who referred to the place of war in a militarist society thought that it was out of date in an industrial society and most liberal economists and political thinkers held similar views. But although Aurobindo's views regarding the role of war in history may not be acceptable from a sociological, historical and psychological standpoint they are intensely significant from the standpoint of what I would call "mystic militarism". It may appear a little strange to hear a Yogi and a seer, whom the Indian mind has long been accustomed to

[1] *Essays on the Gita* (American edition), p. 47.
[2] Johnson, "War", *E. S. S.*
[3] *Essays on the Gita* (American edition,) p. 38.
[4] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 92.

regard as a transcendentalist, talking almost like Machiavelli and Treitschke and referring to the heroic virtues generated by war.[1] The ideal society of Aurobindo—the supramentalized gnostic community—will, however, be pacific in character. Aurobindo, furthermore, is also eloquent about the glories of peace and harmony. In the Chapter "Kurukshetra" in *Essays on the Gita* Aurobindo says: "All this is not to say that strife and destruction are the alpha and omega of existence, that harmony is not greater than war, love more the manifest divine than death or that we must not move towards the replacement of physical force by soul-force, of war by peace, of strife by union, of devouring by love, of egoism by universality, of death by immortal life".[2] Although in his sociological studies of the role of war Aurobindo is realistic and candid enough to recognize some of its virtues and merits, as a prophet of humanity he pleads for the enshrinement of peace, love, mutuality, harmony, altruism and cooperation.

Aurobindo refers to the predominance of "economic barbarism" and commercialism in modern times and thinks that modern wars are not the legitimate outcome of ambition and earth-hunger "but the bastard offspring of wealth-hunger" with political ambition as its putative father.[3] Hence the First World War should not be interpreted in spiritual or ideological terms. It "was a struggle for the possession and enjoyment of the world, of its wealth, its market, its available spaces, an inflated and plethoric commercial expansion, largeness of imperial size and rule," "and if a nobler idea was awakened at least for a time it was only under the scourge of death and before the terrifying spectre of gigantic mutual destruction". But behind all destruction, all commercialism and warfare is the unregenerate human nature and hence "God hammers so fiercely at his world, tramples it . . . casts it so often into the blood-bath".[4] If humanity transcends its crudeness and vileness, the ways of God with it will be loftier and nobler. After all, we find, Aurobindo does not leave us where the social

[1] Aurobindo is a realist in his analysis of social and political forces. He was never a devotee of the absolute creed of Ahimsa. However it should be emphasized that he has been an ardent champion and exponent of the concept of human unity.

[2] *Essays on the Gita* (Calcutta, 1940), vol. I, p. 57.

[3] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 267.

[4] Sri Aurobindo, *Thoughts and Glimpses*, pp. 36-7.

Darwinists do but has visions of a nobler and more peaceful future.

9. CONCLUSION

There is a significant note of optimism in Aurobindo's philosophy of history. It has a great message for India and Asia, and if we also consider his gospel of supramentalized divine supernature and supermanhood, then also for the world.[1] He constructed his historical generalizations at a time when Western civilization was trying to suffocate the soul of India and the East under the colossal weight of a powerful political and economic imperialism strengthened by the resources of science and technology. He had to provide an interpretation of history which would inspire people.[2] He therefore stressed the gigantic Hindu achievements in ancient times with the implied note of their revival and even the possibility of their being excelled. Against the boast of Western imperialism he formulated his theory of the four eras when the intellectual and spiritual influence of India and Asia reached the West.[3] First, Greek philosophers like Pythagoras and Plato transmitted Egyptian, Chaldean and Indian wisdom to Europe. Secondly, Buddhism came to Europe under the Semitized form of Christianity. Thirdly, the Islamic invasions of Spain and the southern Mediterranean were also culturally productive and fourthly, in modern times, Indian metaphysics was entering Europe through the writings of Schlegel, Schopenhauer etc. Aurobindo feels that the intellectual and dynamic mind of Europe and the spiritual and ethical soul of India and Asia should closely co-operate. He is happy to find that an Asiatic intelligentsia trained in European scientific wisdom and also imbued with

[1] Gabriela Mistral: "A Few words on Sri Aurobindo", *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual*, 1950, pp. 140-2.

[2] Cf., Subhas Chandra Bose, *An Indian Pilgrim*, p. 74: "Vivekananda had no doubt spoken of the need of *Jnana*, *Bhakti* and *Karma* in developing an all-round character, but there was something original and unique in Aurobindo's conception of a synthesis of Yoga. He tried to show how by a proper use of the different Yogas one could rise step by step to the highest truth. It was so refreshing, so inspiring to read Aurobindo's Writings as a contrast to the denunciations of knowledge and action by the later-day Bengal Vaishnavas. All that was needed in my eyes to make Aurobindo an ideal *guru* for mankind was his return to active life."

[3] Sri Aurobindo, *Ideals and Progress*, pp. 59-61.

Eastern subjectivist tradition is coming into prominence, and a dynamic synthesis can be attained through its efforts.[1] In the art of the future, the physical traits of the Greek and the psychic traits of the Hindus should be combined.[2] The active and dynamic aspect of European ethics has to be reconciled with the contemplative, intuitional and valuational note of Indian ethics. In this synthesis the East should enjoy prominence because it looked inwards, and the inward orientation should dominate and control the external, not vice versa.[3] The stress on the role of the East in the creative cultural synthesis of the future would imply that Aurobindo's philosophy of history is important for the resurgence of Asia. It had also personal importance for him. His *Uttarpara Speech* shows that the ardent belief in the theory of spiritual determinism helped him in one of the most distressing and even catastrophic moments of his life. His faith that God had given him a message impelled him on to fresh and further spiritual quests and conquests.

Aurobindo's view that sin, suffering, evil and sorrow are not to be viewed as the artifices of an original ignorance or *Avidya* but are to be regarded as the mechanism of God is a new note in Indian thought. In his philosophy of history he refers to the beneficent as well as the destructive aspects of God. His assertion that nature, which in its essence is the spiritual power of God, can and does use even immoral means[4] for effectuating her central will and purpose, is a very bold assertion by a mystic trying to interpret both human and cosmic history.

But there are also weak points in the structure of his philosophy of history. Being related to a spiritualistic metaphysics it is deductive and not sufficiently empirical. Many a time it appears that only selected data are being used and the contrary generalizations could have been proved with equal ease if some other data were selected. But this is a defect perhaps of all universal philosophies of history. In spite of Max Weber, Spengler, Berdyaev, Toynbee and Sorokin with their large-scale sweeping generalizations, the predominant trend to-day in European and American social sciences is towards co-operative

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 240.
[2] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 25.
[3] *Dharma Aur Jatiyata* (in Hindi), pp. 110-2, 115.
[4] *The Riddle of This World*, pp. 80-1.

specific empirical research work, not towards cosmic historical formulations. Since Aurobindo's philosophy of history involves constant and persistent references to the powers and determinations of the trans-terrestrial spheres we sometimes find in it the lack of procedural mechanism and historical details. If a tangible social or natural-historical element could have been considered the central dynamic force in history, the ways of its operations could have been logically, systematically and causally analyzed. But there is an element of inscrutability, incalculability and unpredictability involved in the theory of spiritual determinism. At times it assumes the appearance of a theodicy and becomes the justification for events and happenings in history with reference to the supersentient wisdom of God. Hence it involves a predominance of belief and faith. It is possible not to be an economic or climatological or environmental determinist and still to examine the operation of the economic factor or climate or environment in history. But one who does not believe in Aurobindo's metaphysics cannot get any general hints from it for further empirical research work. For example, one cannot regard the Bengal nationalist movement and the French Revolution as willed by God unless one believes in spiritual philosophy and theology. This scheme of historical interpretation often enshrines faith and belief in place of causal and factual investigations. Moreover Aurobindo's philosophy is highly intuitional and even supra-intuitional because it involves references to the supernal realms of the overmind and the supermind; therefore the insistence is on mystic and Yogic experience. Hence this philosophy goes beyond politics and history and involves the transcendence of human reason. Similar objections can be raised against the Christological interpretations of history that we get in Toynbee or Berdyaev who consider the birth of Christ to be the dominant dynamic event in human history. The central concept in the philosophies of history of Aurobindo and Toynbee and Berdyaev can never get universal acceptance.

At times Aurobindo's philosophy of history does not sufficiently analyse the structure of the specific historical cycles of civilizations. One comes across statements about Asia and the East which are generalizations obtained only upon the basis

of Indian historical data. Thus we find that defects similar to those which pertain to the Hegelian philosophy of history (in Hegel's applying the same sweeping generalizations to China, Persia and India—all indicating the immersion of the spirit and the absence of freedom) are also to be found in Aurobindo's generalizations about the subjectivism of the East and the spiritual soul of Asia.

Since Aurobindo isolates the spiritual factor in history and attempts to show the magnificent achievements of India in the realms of metaphysics, politics, society and art which are regarded as the dynamizations of the spiritual force, his analysis of historical causation assumes a highly monistic note. In modern social sciences we find emphasis on functional interdependence and causal pluralism in place of the older causal monism. It is true that unlike Samkara but like Ramanuja and Hegel, Aurobindo has introduced a dynamic element in his concept of the absolute and even accepts the notions of spiritual involution and evolution. But he does not care sufficiently to analyze social and historical phenomena in terms of plural causation and the interdependence of multiple factors. There is a stupendous emphasis on the theory of the spirit even in his books on social philosophy as *The Human Cycle*, *War and Self-Determination*, *Ideals and Progress*, and others.

Moreover, the concept of spiritual determinism is suffused with a strong note of patriotism, especially in the early writings of Aurobindo. Aurobindo greatly admires the political institutions and ideas of ancient India. He refers to the confusion, violence, infra-rational religious impulses, folly, ignorance, cruelty and gloom of the European Middle Ages, but he has only admiration for the achievements of the Pallavas, the Chalukyas and the Cholas. On grounds of strict historical scholarship the achievements of these Indian political entities are certainly not to be rated higher and more brilliant than those of the eras of Charlemagne and Otto the Great. Aurobindo does not refer to the exploitation of the masses on the basis of which the great splendours of the ancient and medieval kingdoms, whether in India or in Europe, were created. We also feel that there is an element of exaggeration in Aurobindo's praise for the vitalistic, materialistic and positivistic achievements of the Hindus. The

claims do not seem to be adequately documented from the historical angle.

Aurobindo's philosophy of history, in its idealization of the great man as the divinely chosen instrument of mother Kali — the *Zeit-Geist*, reminds one of Hegel and Carlyle with their creeds of the 'world-historical individual' and the 'hero'. The tendency in modern historical seholarship is to emphasize the role of social, political and economic forces and the clash of rival and divergent group interests rather than glorify the Caesars and the Napoleons and the Bismarcks, regardless of the fact that the latter represent an immense concretization of human energy or may be regarded by some theologians as instruments of a superior spiritual force. The idealization of the hero or the Vibhuti or the Avatara at times leads to an unnecessary neglect of the role of the people who even in olden times have constituted the silent and undramatic but nonetheless significant foundation of the historical structure. Those who believe in the supreme importance of climate, environment, or the forces of production in history, also minimize the role of the hero. The psychoanalysts, on the other hand, think that the hero is only an abnormal person trying to rationalize the public and political displacement of some great frustration or psychical and physical handicap of his own. The hero is regarded as seeking external compensations and satisfactions for some personal want or desire. He turns his personal grievance into the quest for some public necessities.

Aurobindo's philosophy of history has a note of chiliasm and futurism in it. The profundity of his faith and conviction in the inevitable dawn of the spiritualized society is demonstrated in the exalted passion and enthusiasm revealed in his writings. There is a cosmic sweep in it and to him the present civilizational crisis is only a symptom of some great cosmic crisis. It appears that nature is in travail, waiting for the descent and dawn of supramental wisdom. This chiliasm puts Aurobindo's philosophy of history in line with the Biblical philosophy of history with its faith in the coming of David or Christ and the inevitable crystallization of the divine kingdom on earth, and distinguishes it from prophecies of human and cosmic fall and decline and degeneration.

This futuristic chiliasm makes Aurobindo a teleologist in history. According to him history is not an aimless, purposeless, random conglomeration of mechanical forces; there is an inward spiritual purpose running throughout the historical structure. Aristotle also accepted a cosmic teleology. Hegel thought that the purpose of the revelation of the *Welt-Geist* in history is the attainment of freedom. Even according to the materialist Marx there is a goal in history — the attainment of freedom through a classless communism. Aurobindo is confident that the aspirations of mankind for freedom, light, peace and immortality are going to be realized through the supramental progression of history and evolutionary nature. The teleological conception of history has two main defects. First, it is partial and selective in its orientation. The fancies and predilections of the historian come to the front, and what he through his own experiences and intuitions considers significant he exalts into a cosmic purpose. Hence freedom, communism or supramental gnosis are each in turn considered the most significant goal of the historical process.[1] Secondly, the teleological conception introduces a note of tragedy in history. It makes a distinction between all the past history of mankind and a certain period of future time. It thinks that by this periodization it has found the aim of history. But in so doing it makes all the past periods of mankind as well as the present only the means for the future, and later generations are supposed to enjoy the fruits of all this long and vast labour of mankind. In so doing, it unconsciously introduces an extraneous axiological category in the historic process. According to the teleological conception, whatever has gone before was a means, was inadequate; what is to come in the future is the goal, and would represent the fullness and consummation of historical endeavours. Spengler rightly reacts against this universal historical teleology and wants to analyze the significance of separate cultures.

But Aurobindo's philosophy of history, in spite of its inadequacies, represents a great theoretical advance. For the first time in India's history we find a great metaphysician and mystic trying to reflect upon the social, political and artistic achieve-

[1] The goals of the historical process are conceived according to the preferences of the philosopher, e.g. freedom according to Hegel, communism according to Marx and gnostic supermanhood according to Aurobindo.

ments of the Indian peoples. There are various elements in this philosophy of history — the Vedantic concept of the ultimate reality; the almost Hegelian rationalization and justification of evil, war, hatred and sorrow as forces in history; the Nietzschean concept of the superman given, of course, divine and not Prussian attributes; the Vaishnava concept of the *lila* of Brahman; the Tantric notion of Kali etc. All these have been integrated in a theoretical philosophic structure showing great scholarship, a deep religious mysticism and a romantic imagination. What commended it to Aurobindo was its synthesis of the absolute and the world, spirit and life, mysticism and politics; it enabled him to concentrate on ultimate spiritual values without neglecting the temporary but nonetheless significant values of political liberty and social dynamics.

CHAPTER TWO

SRI AUROBINDO'S THEORY OF CIVILIZATION AND CULTURE

1. THE CYCLICAL INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY

AUROBINDO accepts the notion of cyclical movement in human and cosmic history. He repudiates the straightlinear theory of human progression. According to him there are periods of progression as well as of downward recoils, "the whole constituting an evolution that is cyclic rather than in one straight line".[1] He thinks it possible to have a theory not only of the cyclic evolution of social and political history, but also a universal "theory of cycles of human evolution" which is hinted at in the concept of the several Manus and Manvantaras in the Puranas.[2] He supports his views with reference to the Vedantic theory of the eternal cycles of manifestation and withdrawal from manifestation.[3] On the basis of the Vedantic and Yogic systems of thought, Vivekananda also criticized the notion of the constant progression of man and held that progress often brings us back to the starting-point.[4] The concept of cosmic cycles is also found in the Zoroastrian mythology, and was probably transmitted to Aristotle through the Greek colonists of Asia Minor. In modern times Nietzsche revived the cycle theory in his concept of "eternal recurrence". From the theory of cosmic cycle is derived Aurobindo's view about "the cyclical or spiral progression", or at least "a very zigzag swinging curve of advance".[5] The cyclical conception resembles the dialectical theory of history to the extent that both repudiate the idea of a constant straightlinear progression and both emphasize catastrophic movements and retrogressions in history.

A cyclical theory of historical evolution, I think, can be

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *Evolution*, p. 8.
[2] *Ibid.*; *Essays on the Gita*, vol. II, p. 233.
[3] Sri Aurobindo, *Heraclitus*, p. 27.
[4] *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. I, p. 196.
[5] *The Life Divine* (American edition), p. 92.

considered to have three significant characteristics.[1] It conceives of each historical cycle as an independent unit. In the straightlinear theory the whole historical structure is conceived of as a total unit and hence in the consideration of each particular element the entire structure becomes significant and relevant. Secondly, distinguished from the fervent sentimentalism of the straightlinear theory emphasizing growth, advance, development and constant progress the cycle theory accepts occasional destructions, leaps, catastrophic retreats and retrogressions in history. Thirdly, the cycle theory accepts repetitions, individual as well as cosmic. It generally repudiates the diffusionist view of cultural anthropology and tends to accept the autonomous spontaneous generation of methods and instruments of biological and social adjustment to the environment, in different historical cycles.[2] Sometimes, as in Nietzsche and possibly also in Aristotle, it accepts cosmic repetitions. The theory of cosmic repetitions is also found in the Puranas. Concentrating only on human history we find that there is truth in both, in the straightlinear and the cyclical versions. In the realms of the cosmological and mathematical sciences which are highly abstract and impersonal, there can be detected a course of almost straightlinear progressive advance based on the organization and systematization of the previously existing body of knowledge. On the other hand, in the realms of the humanistic branches of knowledge — what Dilthey calls *Lebensphilosophie* — we find that there can be repetitions and retrogressions. For example, modern European science is more advanced than Hellenic science but can we say that Greek art and literature is in any way inferior to modern art and literature?

Aurobindo derived the theory of the human cycle not only from the Vedanta, but has also been profoundly influenced by the German historian Karl Lamprecht (1856-1915).[3] He

[1] In modern times, we find cyclical theories of history in Danilevsky, Spengler etc. For a history of cyclical theories of history and social progression. See P.A. Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Dynamics*, vol. IV, pp. 441-554.

[2] The opposition, however, between the two schools of cultural evolution and diffusion has slowly been reconciled.

[3] Karl Lamprecht, *Deutsche Geschichte* (1891-1909), 12 volumes; *Deutsches Wirtschaftsleben im Mittelalter* (Leipzig, 1885-86), 3 volumes; *Zur Fungsten deutschen Vergangenheit*, (Berlin, 1901-4), 3 volumes; *Moderne Geschichtswissenschaft* (Freiburg, 1905, English Translation by E.A. Andrews, *What is History*? New York, 1905).

says: "... in pre-war Germany ... a first psychological theory of history was conceived and presented by an original intelligence. . . .A German historian, originator of this theory, seized on a luminous idea . . . its basic idea formulated a suggestive and illuminating truth, and it is worthwhile following up some of the suggestions it opens out in the light especially of Eastern thought and experience."[1] This task he proceeds to accomplish in his book, *The Human Cycle*.

Lamprecht was opposed to the two basic currents in German historical methodology.[2] The neo-Kantian school of German axiology of Windelband and Rickert propounded a sharp separation between the value-free nomothetic natural sciences dealing with the general or the universal or the typal on the one hand, and the value-oriented, idiographic historical sciences dealing with the specific, the unique and the particular on the other. In opposition to this tendency Lamprecht maintained that scientific thought even in history should limit itself to the typical. Therefore he developed his theory of the socio-physical stages of evolution which succeed one another in a definite order. The school of Ranke was the second intellectual current against which Lamprecht was reacting. Ranke and the political historians of Germany, according to Lamprecht, were concerned with *wie ist es eigentlich gewesen*? — how did it *happen*? — and hence followed the narrative method. Lamprecht tried to investigate *wie ist es eigentlich geworden*? — how did it *become*? — and so he followed the genetic method. Unlike the political historians he was concerned with cultural history.[3]

Lamprecht divided German history into five stages.[4] The first was the symbolic stage when in primitive Germany, fancy and imagination were dominant and the individual was almost merged in the family and the clan and did not have any separate legal personality. In the second stage or the typal age of the early Middle Ages, types were developed. The later Middle Ages saw the emergence of the third or conventional stage characterized by the territorial basis of political rule and the growth of urban centres. The Renaissance and the Reformation began

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, p. 2.
[2] Rudolf Eucken, *Main Currents of Modern Thought*, p. 120.
[3] G.P. Gooch, *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 558.
[4] Karl Lamprecht, *What is History*? 1905, Quoted in Gooch, *op. cit.*

the fourth stage, the age of individualism, which culminated in the *Aufklärung* and the rise of rationalistic philosophy. The Romantic movement with the reaction of *Gefühl* (feelings) against *Verstand*(understanding) and *Vernunft*(reason)ushered in the fifth or the subjective stage. The present age, according to Lamprecht, is one of *Reizbarkeit* (nervous tension), with no dominant ideal, and marked by enterprise, speculation and general nervous anxiety. Although Lamprecht constructed his theory of five psychological stages on the basis of German history he thought that the scheme could be universally applied because these psychic stages can be traced in the evolution of all countries. He thinks that for each age there is a psychical force which guides and impels all phases of human activity.[1] But Lamprecht is not constructing a purely psychological interpretation of history. Although he accepted that every economic action was psychologically dominated, yet due to his being influenced by Marx he also believed in the influence of economic changes on social and psychic life.[2] Therefore history, according to Lamprecht, is not a purely psychic process but a socio-psychic process, a view which we also partly find in Le Bon and James Harvey Robinson. Hans Freyer, the German sociologist, has been influenced by this socio-psychic historical interpretation of Lamprecht.[3]

Lamprecht's theory of history, however, lacks a unified conceptual structure and hence it appears that he makes a mechanical jump from one stage to another. The logic of the historical advance is not fully clear. Being engrossed with his concept of 'folk-soul' and the external influences on it, it appears he minimizes carelessly the role of the creative individuals in history. Although Aurobindo has been greatly influenced by Lamprecht, so much so that he writes a book covering over three hundred pages based on the conceptual scheme of the German historian, he still points out certain defects of the scheme.[4] First, Lamprecht does not explain the inner meaning of the successive phases of historical evolution. Secondly, he does not demonstrate the logical necessity of the specific succession

[1] Kurt Breysig, "Lamprecht", *E.S.S.*
[2] Gooch, *op. cit.*, p. 570.
[3] *Introduction to the History of Sociology*, ed. by H.E. Barnes, p. 365.
[4] Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, p. 3.

of the five phases. Thirdly, he does not discover the ultimate teleology towards which the historical process is moving. Aurobindo, on the other hand, firmly believes in the concept of a spiritual ultimate reality which manifests itself in history and thereby imparts an immanent meaning and a final teleology to the historic process. Aurobindo is also repelled by the great importance which Lamprecht attributes to the economic factor, perhaps because of his (Lamprecht's) being influenced by the school of historical materialism.

Aurobindo thinks that the Vedic Age represented the symbolic phase of Indian history, with intuition, mystic vision and imagination predominating. In the interpretation of the Vedic Samhitas he repudiates the naturalistic-historical-philological method of European Vedic scholarship as also the theological methodology of Sayana. He has possibly been influenced by Dayananda who revived in modern times the older view of the Nirukta that besides a materialistic and theological meaning the Vedic hymns had also a mystical and a metaphysical significance.[1] Aurobindo has attempted the mystic interpretation of the Rigvedic hymns to Agni. According to him the Vedic mystics had four principal tenets.[2] First, they represent a quest after the higher truth, a higher light and a discovery of the path to immortality. Secondly, they want to attain the Sun of gnostic truth, illumined knowledge and perfect right or *Rita.* Thirdly, they conceive of life in terms of a struggle between the forces of light, the Devas, and the forces of darkness, the Asuras; the constant aid of the gods is invoked for help and power. Fourthly, they believe in the ultimate reality of an everconscient existence — the *Ekam Sat.* Aurobindo also agrees with Dayananda in thinking that the Vedic Rishis had a monotheistic conception.

Aurobindo interprets the Vedic gods as permanent emanations of the divine and the Vedic sacrifice or *Yajna* as the outer symbol of an inner action. He thinks that mystics not only in India but also in other countries possessed the secrets of an esoteric science and were occultists. In the formulation of his

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *Bankima-Tilak-Dayananda* (Arya Publishing House, Calcutta, 1947), pp. 60-1.

[2] Sri Aurobindo, *Hymns to the Mystic Fire* (first edition of 1946), pp. XXIX-XXXII.

own theory of spiritual law Aurobindo has accepted the Vedic view of an immortal law and permanent truth (*Rita*), ever-active but operating differently according to the dynamic medium in which the work proceeds. He interprets the famous *Nasadiya* hymn of the Rigveda to signify the idea of an inconscient or subconscient primeval ocean out of which the worlds form themselves under the supervision of an omnipotent and creative superconscient.

There is also a nationalistic implication in Aurobindo's Vedic interpretations. He holds that the Vedas, India's stupendous Rock of Ages, contain the secrets of an esoteric science now lost to the modern world. His nationalism becomes apparent in his statement that modern science is driving towards a monism which is consistent with multiplicity, and this he considers a drive "towards the Vedic idea of the one essence with its many becomings". One of the basic beliefs of the revivalist Indian nationalists has been that the ancient scriptures of the Hindus contain not only the final word of philosophic wisdom but are also full of scientific knowledge. The most pronounced propagandist of this view has been Dayananda and it seems a little surprising that Gurudatta Vidyarthi, one of his disciples and a college lecturer in physical science, should sincerely try to find out truths pointed out by modern physics and chemistry in Vedic terminology.[1] That the Rishis of old had not only the mastery of a supraphysical Yogic science superior to modern natural sciences but also thoroughly knew the fundamental elements of physical science itself, is a belief held by Indian nationalists and especially by the members of the Arya Samaj. This is the great vindication of reaction of the ancient Hindu spirit against the encroachments of a powerful Western civilization full of intellectual pride. The views of Dayananda and the Arya Samaj have also been partly shared by others. Tilak, the famous author of the *Orion* and *The Arctic Home in the Vedas*, held that the conclusions arrived at by ancient Rishis were being substantiated by modern science.[2] It is in this broad perspective of the conflict between two systems of civilization that we can appreciate the burning vehemence of Aurobindo's statements:

[1] Gurudatta Vidyarthi, *The Terminology of the Vedas*.
[2] Tilak's lecture of January 3, 1906 at the Bharat Dharma Mahamandala, Banaras.

"There is then nothing fantastic in Dayananda's idea that the Veda contains truths of science as well as truths of religion. I will even add my own conviction that the Veda contains the other truths of a science the modern world does not at all possess, and in that case Dayananda has rather understated than overstated the range and depth of the Vedic wisdom"[1] and "The Veda is as much and more a book of divine law as the Hebrew Bible or Zoroastrian Avesta".

The symbolic Vedic age was succeeded by a spiritualized typal society which was predominantly psychological and ethical, and enshrined social honour. Varna was the characteristic institution of that age. The typal age was succeeded by the conventional age. The conventional stage believes in social regularization, arrangement, formalization, systematization and traditionalism. The caste system is one of the significant products of this age.

The individualist stage of human society represents the age of protestantism, reason, revolt, progress and freedom.[2] Europe gave birth to individualism. The seeds of individualism lay in the early Christian belief that man is a divine personality. Luther and Calvin emphasized individual conscience as the final authority in religious interpretation against the oecumenical pretensions of the Pope as the infallible scriptural guide. The school of social contract and natural right formulated the concept of indefeasible and inalienable rights which had to be guaranteed by the civil society. Capitalism led to the rise of economic individualism. Aurobindo finds also the seeds of atheism, secularism and anarchism in individualism, because the *homo sapiens* as a gigantic Prometheus is repelled by the authorities of God and state. "The individualistic age of Europe was in its beginning a revolt of reason, in its culmination a triumphal progress of physical science."[3] According to Lamprecht the rise of romanticism marked the end of individualism in Europe. Aurobindo finds that the rationalistic individualistic civilization of the West is spreading in the world because of the political rise and military triumph of European powers. Its victory in the world has been consequent on the phenomenon that "the

[1] *Bankima-Tilak-Dayananda*, p. 57.
[2] *The Human Cycle*, p. 13.
[3] *The Human Cycle*, p. 15.

rest of mankind . . . still in the inactivity of the last dark hours of the conventional stage"[1] could not offer any important counter-idea to European rationalism, science and individualism.

According to Lamprecht, romanticism initiated the subjective age in Germany. Aurobindo finds the rise of subjectivism in pre-war Germany, Ireland and India. Subjectivism was dominant in Germany because of the influence of German idealistic philosophers, German musicians like Beethoven and Wagner and also because of Goethe and Nietzsche. [2] Bismark and William II were not the creators of this subjectivism. Aurobindo considers the appearance of the Bismarkian "Blood and Iron" a misfortune for Germany in many respects "because his rude and powerful hand precipitated its subjectivity into form and action at too early a stage; a longer period of incubation might have produced results less disastrous to itself, if less violently stimulative to humanity".[3] Aurobindo feels that there have been some gravely erroneous consequences of the false German subjectivism or the bastard creed of objective subjectivism.[4] It exalted the idea of success and preached war with other collectivities. It championed aggressive Teutonism, the supremacy and superiority of Nordic Germany and the conquest of the world by German culture. The sources of the false gospel of German subjectivism are to be found not in a mere barbaric reversion to the ancient religion of Odin.[5] The German "gospel (was) born of the application of a metaphysical logic to the conclusions of materialistic science, of a philosophic subjectivism to the objective pragmatic positivism of recent thought. Just as Germany applied the individualistic position to the realization of her communal subjective existence, so she applied the materialistic and vitalistic thought of recent times and equipped it with a subjective philosophy".[6] Aurobindo interprets the First World War as "a confused half struggle, half effort at accommodation between the old intellectual and materialistic and the new still superficial subjective and vitalistic impulses in the West".[7] President T. G. Masaryk also interpreted the First World War in terms of a tussle between subjectivism and objectivism.[8]

[1] *The Human Circle*, p. 15. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 46. [3] *The Human Cycle*, p. 46.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 55-60. [5] *Ibid.*, pp. 62-3. [6] *Ibid.* [7] *Ibid.*, pp. 35-6.
[8] T.G. Masaryk, *The Making of a State*.

The East has had an innate orientation towards the psychic and subjective aspect and therefore even in the political movements of Persia, India and China, or even in the movement of Japanese resurgence which tried to imitate the West a little too much, one can discover a note of subjectivism. It is doubtful if Aurobindo would have applied his statement to cover also the new communist China. The resurgence of Asia generated by the rude thrust and impact of the individualist West upon her broke the silence and stagnation of the conventional age and ushered in a period of individualism. But Aurobindo thinks that this individualistic period in Asian history would neither be of long duration nor predominantly secularistic and intellectualistic. Due to its native subjectivism the East may evolve a new social dynamics based on spirituality and that may prove to be an important force in world politics. [1]

But even subjectivism is not enough, because there can be a subjectivism emphasizing physical and vital psychical satisfactions. [2] It is therefore necessary to discover the real nature of man and the ideal law of social and national development and to find the secrets of self-realization for men and nations. [3] The gratification of the individual or collective ego is not true subjectivism. This quest for true subjectivism brings us to one of the most fundamental points in Aurobindo's political philosophy — the contrast between civilization and culture. [4]

2. PHILOSOPHICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN CIVILIZATION AND CULTURE

Francis Bacon was the first to give a definite content to the concept of culture. The French rationalists and encyclopaedists began to use the term civilization to characterize their own period of history as distinguished from the dark ages and feudalism. Turgot first used the term civilization in this sense. Since then a contrast began to be made between civilized man and

[1] *The Human Cycle*, p. 25.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 313.

[3] Beyond a vital subjectivism and a mental and psychic subjectivism Aurobindo pleads for the emergence of a spiritualised society and a spiritual age.

[4] Cf. the Hellenic concept of *Paideia*; also the German distinction between *Zivilization* and *Bildung*.

natural man. In Germany Herder first used the term *Kultur*. Goethe used the term *Geisteskultur*. Kant and Fichte conceived freedom to be the essence of culture. Henceforward the two terms *Zivilization* and *Kultur* began to be distinguished as being lower and higher. Kant says: "We have become cultivated in a high degree through art and science. We have become civilized to the point of being over-burdened in every kind of social behaviour and convention. But there is yet a great deal to be done before we can call ourselves 'moralised'. For the idea of morality is a portion of culture; though when the idea is employed only in the sense of mere uniform conventions of honour and outward propriety it does not amount to anything more than civilization." Culture, as Kant conceives it, is the "drawing forth of a rational being's capacity for certain ends in general".[1] The writers of the French enlightenment and Fichte and Humboldt also distinguished between culture and civilization in terms of ethics. According to them moralization is an integral element of culture.

The distinction between externally-oriented civilization and inwardly-directed culture has received further elaboration at the hands of Russian writers like Danilevsky and Berdyaev and the German writer Oswald Spengler. In nineteenth century Russia there were two rival schools of thought. The Westernizers wanted to complete the work begun by Peter and Catherine as soon as possible and they had profound admiration for the ways and patterns of Western European civilization. But the Slavophils were enamoured of the Orthodox soul of Holy Russia and they drew inspiration from Byzantium and Kiev. The Russian Slavophils adopted the distinction between civilization and culture and claimed that despite her higher civilization Europe was morally decadent; on the other hand the culture of Orthodox Russia was superior and the future lay in that. Danilevsky developed this theme in his book *Russia and Europe*.[2] One can trace this idea in almost the whole of nineteenth century Russian literature. Berdyaev, in the same tradition, considers culture as concerned with the qualitative and symbolic realization of values, and civilization with the organi-

[1] Quoted in R. Eucken, *Main Currents of Modern Thought* (London, 1912), p. 284.
[2] P.A. Sorokin, "Nikolai Danilevsky", *Social Philosophies of an Age of Crisis*, pp. 49-71.

zation of life and the technological conquest of nature. The highest aim of man and society, according to him, is to achieve inward transfiguration.

The great distinction between culture and civilization as found in the modern social sciences[1] and philosophy has been dramatically elucidated by Spengler. According to Spengler every culture arises in the proto-soul of humanity. It has some fundamental prime symbols, for example, stone in the Egyptian culture, and pure and limitless space in the Faustian Western culture. We find in Spengler an emphasis on the *seelentum*—the soul of a culture, because a culture is born when a great soul awakens out of the proto-spirituality of childish humanity and it dies when this soul has actualized the full sum of its possibilities and reverts into the proto-soul.[2] Every culture in its last stage passes through a period of civilization; for example, Buddhism, Stoicism and Socialism are the characteristic products of the Indian, Roman and Western civilizations.[3] Culture is characterised by spiritual creativeness and artistic and philosophical accomplishments while internationalism, plutocracy, technology, urbanization and materialism characterize civilization. Spengler thought that the Western peoples were passing through a period of civilization which is the fourth and last stage in every culture-cycle and is the prelude to its decline. Thus we see that according to philosophers like Kant, Fichte, Spengler and also the Russian writers, the basic and fundamental distinction between civilization and culture is that the former looks to the outward, material, political and social accomplishments while culture is orientated towards artistic, ethical and spiritual excellence. In the realm of theoretical sociology this distinction is hinted at in the difference between *Naturwissenschaft* and *Geisteswissenschaft*.

A different conception of the word culture has become prevalent in Western social sciences with the rise of cultural anthropology. Anthropologists like Malinowski consider culture to be an instrumental reality aiding mankind in the process of adjustment to natural environment. It is equated with man's

[1] The distinction between civilization and culture is maintained by Alfred Weber and Robert M. MacIver.
[2] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, I, p. 21.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 31.

social heritage and comprises the artifacts, technical processes, ideas, habits and values. Social organization is a part of culture. In this sense the term culture refers to the material artifacts as well as to the customs and institutions of the most primitive peoples. According to the anthropologists the term civilization refers to the specialized and sophisticated aspects of the more advanced cultures. In the distinctions that Aurobindo draws between civilization and culture there is a fundamental resemblance to the ideas of Kant and Berdyaev, and not to the conceptions of the modern anthropologists.

In his typological delineations of barbarism, civilization and culture Aurobindo begins with his metaphysical assumptions about the successive emergence of matter, life and mind through evolutionary progression from the inconscient. He considers barbarism to be a savage state of complete immersion in a life of physical and material satisfactions. The Red Indians, the Basuto and the Fiji Islanders provide examples of this barbarism. These people have some simple conceptions of social living and very elementary ethical and religious notions. They have a good many virtues in which many civilizations are wanting but they are considered barbarian because of their inadequate intellectual development, the crudeness of their technology and the absence of social and economic heterogeneity and complexity.[1] Modern social scientists have debated upon the question of the pre-rational thinking of the primitive peoples. The French school of sociologists thought that there was a fundamental difference between the pre-logical mental operations of the primitives and the logical methodology of the moderns. Adolf Bastian and Malinowski do not accept a typological distinction of this kind. Aurobindo perhaps would refuse to consider the primitive stage as pre-logical. Since in that period lower vital intuitions and instincts play the leading role it could very well be called an infrarational period of human existence.

[1] *The Human Cycle*, pp. 102-6.

3. THEORY OF CIVILIZATION AND PROGRESS

(a) *The Concept of Civilization*

Civilization, according to Aurobindo, means the resplendence and flowering of vital sentiments and intellectual activities. It is an age of civil society, organized political and economic living and the growth of knowledge and science, but all these are used for the sake of maximization of comforts, commodities and enjoyments. The concrete shape of civilization he discovers in the modern West. Civilization is criticized by Aurobindo on two grounds. First, its vitalistic engrossments are considered inadequate in the spiritualistic metaphysics of Aurobindo. Secondly, the excesses of Western civilization are condemned by him from the standpoint of an Indian nationalist.

Aurobindo is indignant at "the callow civilization of the West with its dogmatic and intolerant knowledge, its still more dogmatic and intolerant ignorance, its deification of selfishness and force and its ungoverned titanism".[1] The characteristics of modern civilization, according to Aurobindo, are commercialism, sensational vitalistic activism and a certain amount of democratization.[2] Commercialism, he says, is the fundamental sin of modern civilization. The ancient period of human society was primarily religious and to some extent political. Commercialism with its emphasis on the power of the plutocracy —the Vaishya—to govern society, is a modern phenomenon. Commercial motivation was always a subordinate and dependent factor in ancient warfare and diplomacy.[3] Wealth was considered a subsidiary adjunct to political power. After ancient man ceased to be predominantly religious in his consciousness and motivation the political factor assumed a significant place. The Franco-Prussian War marks the end of political motivation in European history.[4] It was the last important war dictated by political motives. Since then the political motive has been merely a cover for the commercial. Aurobindo seems correct in the historical examples given by him to substantiate his thesis.

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *Kalidasa*, p. 26.
[2] *The Human Cycle*, p. 107.
[3] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 261-2.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 266-7.

The Austrian diplomacy in Serbia was interested in the possession of the outlet to the Adriatic Sea through Salonika, primarily for commercial reasons. Pan-Germanism wanted territories in Africa and a large outlet into the North Sea primarily for commercial reasons. The activities of the European powers in Africa, China, Persia and Mesopotamia show the same dominant commercialistic trends. Historians are agreed that since the rise of a new imperialism in 1870, Asiatic and African questions figured largely in the calculations of European diplomats. The growth of commercial and economic factors has led to the development of an industrialized society "divided between the service of bourgeois capitalism and the office of a half involuntary channel for the incoming of economic socialism".[1] The older ideal of science—the advancement of knowledge, has been replaced by an utilitarian ideal—its role and function in creating a technological framework for the modern commercial civilization. Hence it is that Aurobindo is critical of the mechanical economics and the "economic barbarism" of the present age.[2] The main characteristic of such an age is the quest after vital success, satisfaction, productiveness, accumulation, possession, enjoyment, comfort and convenience for their own sake and not as intermediate agencies for a larger growth and fullness of being and existence. In this pan-economism of modern civilization with its encroachment even into the domain of thought, poetry and religion, Aurobindo notices a great insufficiency and he refers to "the reeling back into the beast which is in progress in Europe and America behind the fair exterior of science, progress, civilization and humanitarianism".[3] In this type of social and intellectual orientation which creates the basis for armed military preparedness, commercial rivalries, national egoism and chauvinism, lie the germs of war.[4]

A profound hostility to the type of civilization prevalent in Western countries is a basic theme in modern Indian political thought.[5] In his early days Tagore was an admirer of Western

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 264. [2] *The Human Cycle*, pp. 94-5.
[3] Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 38.
[4] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 251-2.
[5] Cf. The reaction against Civilization in Nietzshe, Carlyle, the Romantics, the French Catholics, the symbolists, etc.; N. Berdyaev, *The Meaning of History*, p. 208.

civilization. He had hoped that contact with the West would rekindle the decaying lamp of Indian knowledge but later on he was exceedingly critical of the West. He saw around him the tottering ruins of a proud and arrogant civilization strewn like a colossal heap of waste and he earnestly hoped that perhaps once again the saving light would come from the East.[1] Under the influence of Tolstoy, Gandhi termed Western civilization a disease which ruins the natural health and mental purity of man by multiplying machines, lawyers and doctors. In his first visit, Vivekananda was inspired by the West but in his second journey to the West he became critical of it. In Aurobindo also we find constant references to the dominance of selfishness, hatred, violence and the cult of utility in Western civilization. But while Gandhi was primarily critical of the industrialism and imperialism of the West, Aurobindo refers more to the excesses of rationalism, vitalism and philistinism in Western civilization. While Gandhi thinks that the "not incurable disease" of Western civilization could be cured by the moral remedy of non-violence and truth, Aurobindo takes a more dialectical and deterministic attitude. He thinks that even the mechanism, materialism, vitalism and rationalism of the West have been necessary instruments wielded by the *Zeit-Geist* to demonstrate the maximum possibilities of the physical and intellectual aspects of human life. Therefore the eventual spiritual age of the human cycle will be more integral and comprehensive because it would synthesize even the significant essence of the materialistic aspects of life by a spiritual transformation.

The criticisms of Western civilization in modern Indian political thought have been inspired by the general feeling that it is predominantly secularistic. But this spiritual deficiency of Western Christian civilization has been passionately denied by Schweitzer, Toynbee and Berdyaev. Behind all the technological and materialistic achievements of the West, Schweitzer discovers the creativism of the spirit. Toynbee thinks that to the growth and expansion of Western civilization the spiritual dynamic has been imparted by Christianity and in it he sees the

[1] Tagore had condemned the "carnivorous and cannibalistic" civilization of the West which was based on exclusiveness and led to the petrification of the moral nature of man. R.N. Tagore, *Nationalism*, pp. 59,33.

requisite saving power for civilizations. Berdyaev holds that the prostration of Asiatic cultures was due to the fact that Christianity with its soul-inspiring spiritual power was not accepted by the East. Behind even the Western atheistical socialism and science he traces the old Christian inspired idea of the perfectibility of man and society. [1] Perhaps the only thing that I would say regarding this problem is that because of a not too great absorption in politics and economics, as compared to the Western people, and also because of physical and vital weakness the Indians and the Chinese have perhaps developed a more tolerant and kindly attitude towards other beings. That probably gives to their literary and cultural philosophies a more ethical and humanistic note.

(*b*) *Critique of the Concept of Progress*

Since Aurobindo is critical of modern commercial vitalism and expansiveness he also repudiates the cult of progress. The doctrine of progress began to occupy an important place in European thought after the writings of Turgot and Condorcet. It was believed that the harnessing of the powers of science would lead to the creation of a better society and a more satisfied future. This doctrine of progress has been considered by some thinkers like Berdyaev and Kohn to be a secularized scientific version of the older Jewish and Christian belief in the perfectibility of man and the eventual creation of a millennialistic kingdom of God on earth. The theory of progress is intimately connected with the concept of civilization. Both the ideas arose in the same intellectual and social surroundings and both had great hopes from the various creative powers of science. Being a believer in the cyclic theory of history, Aurobindo is critical of straighlinear theories of human progression. Being a moralist, he would try to replace the idea of purely material achievements by ethical growth and inward advance. [2] Being a spiritualist, he would consider that only to be real progress which makes possible the advent of the spirital age of the human cycle. Progress, according to him, is an evolutionary ascent

[1] Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Meaning of History*, pp. 169-70.
[2] Sri Aurobindo, *Evolution*, p. 30.

towards the acquisition of spiritual power, conscious awareness and delight. The mechanism of individual and social progress is a double movement of "self-illumination of man" and "self-harmonization with the intelligence and the intelligent will as the intermediaries between his soul and its works".[1] There are two kinds of progress.[2] It is "adaptive" when there are only changes on the periphery and the central social principle is untouched; but it becomes "radical" when the dominant foundational principles also are questioned. But there has always been something "unreal, inconclusive and tormented" about human progress because some of the abstract and remote ideas of men have been put into form and shape before they have had sufficient time to obtain the power to convert their psychology and soul.[3] This neutrality to some of the deeper subliminal foundations of man's being has been supported by the rise of materialism and Darwinian biology. The older idea of the moral perfection of man and terrestrial beatitude as popularized by the ancient religions of Asia, has been supplanted by an external mechanical criterion which measures progress only in terms of more efficient methods of production and increasing control over and manipulation of the alien forces of nature. Instead of the dominance of the integral vision and compassion of the prophet, the idealist and the sage we find deference to the verdict of the specialists and the opinion of the economist and the technological expert. Aurobindo's basic objection to the modern concept of progress is that it is too mechanical and it does not care to find out the basic teleology of social and economic progress. Although there has been an unprecedented increase in man's social, economic and scientific resources the fundamental human problems are still unsolved and therefore he is constrained to think that perhaps the idea of human progress itself is an illusion. It is true that man has increased his instrumental pragmatic and manipulative control over the forces of nature but there has been no growth in his real capacities because "he is what he always was in the early beginnings of civilization: he continues to manifest the same capacities, the same qualities and defects, the same efforts,

[1] *The Human Cycle*, p. 142. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 238.
[3] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 342-3.

blunders, achievements, frustrations. If progress there has been, it is in a circle, at most perhaps in a widening circle."[1]

The Western doctrine of progress which bore the arrogant marks of its birth in the triumphant career of a still immature eighteenth century science and rationalism, and to which was imparted a deterministic note in the nineteenth century at the hands of Comte and Marx, is based on a false concept of periodization. This doctrine implies a belief in the over-all superiority of the present to the ancient and medieval periods of human history. After the discovery of the Babylonian civilization, the great German historian Eduard Meyer began seriously to doubt whether the modern man has really progressed beyond the ancient man.[2] Aurobindo seriously and emphatically challenges the foundations of the modern claim to progress and superiority. "Man today is not wiser than the ancient seers and sages and thinkers—not more spiritual than the great seekers of old, the first mighty mystics, not superior in arts and crafts to the ancient artists and craftsmen; the old races that have disappeared showed as potent an intrinsic originality, invention, capacity of dealing with life; and, if modern man in this respect has gone a little farther, not by any essential progress but in degree, scope, abundance, it is because he has inherited the achievements of his forerunners. Nothing warrants the idea that he will ever hew his way out of the half-knowledge, half-ignorance which is the stamp of its kind, or even if he develops a higher knowledge that he can break out of the outmost boundary of the mental circle."[3]

The concept of progress as found in modern Western social sciences and philosophy, which have been deeply influenced by the traditions of positivism, humanism and scientific rationalism, depends, after all, on fluctuating subjective criteria of evaluation. Certainly the modern age of human history has not produced towering prophets and spiritual leaders like Buddha or Christ or Krishna. But during the last two centuries there has been tremendous technological and scientific progress. Hence the final objectives have first to be defined, with reference

[1] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 658.
[2] N. Berdyaev, *The Meaning of History*, p. 194.
[3] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 658.

to the approximations to which progress will be judged and measured. Moreover, the time-perspective has to be clarified. Otherwise we cannot have a definite historical vision and would not be able to attain clarity and precision with respect to the period concerning which an evaluative generalization has to be made. The plethoric growth of historical research showing the decline, prostration and death of diverse cultures makes this demarcation of a specific historical time-limit imperative. Indian civilization from the fifteenth to the seventh century B.C., for example, was certainly more advanced than the European civilization of the corresponding period. On the other hand, the European civilization of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries A.D., with its monumental achievement in science, was more advanced than the Indian civilization of the corresponding periods. Hence it is essential to specify the periods with reference to which evaluative judgments have to be made. With his tragic realization of some of the inward contradictions and profound anguish of man and history Berdyaev points out that the concept of progress postulates a "rationalisation of disintegrated time"[1] because it makes a false distinction between the present and the total past; and instead of judging the value of the latter with reference to its immediate historical perspective, makes it only a means for the present, which is idealized as the goal of all previous history. The destructiveness of modern wars and the resulting evils, chaos and catastrophes have seriously shaken the beliefs of European and American scientists and thinkers in the eighteenth century "heavenly city" and in the calm complacence of nineteenth century positivism.[2]

4. PHILOSOPHY OF CULTURE

(a) *Aesthetic and Ethical Culture*

Because of the inadequacies of a vitalistic and intellectualized civilization and its cult of progress, Aurobindo wants the development of culture. Culture belongs to a higher realm — higher than the crude and partial conventionalized civilization of the

[1] N. Berdyaev, *The Meaning of History*, p. 189.
[2] Cf.G. Sorel, *Les illusions du progres* (Pairs, 1908).

vital type. Culture signifies "the pursuit of mental life for its own sake".[1] The aim of a complete and integral culture is "to raise and enlarge the internal man, the mind, the soul, the spirit"[2] on the basis of the social, political and economic foundations of a vitalistic civilization. But as a specific concept culture is concerned with the total development of the mind. The growth of the spiritual age refers to a state even beyond mental and intellectual cultúre. A truly cultured and accomplished humanity is not satisfied with the activities of the sense-mind and the vital mind but wants the development of the aesthetic, the volitional and the intellectual faculties of man. The governance of the total life is to be exercised, in an era of genuine culture, not by an egoistic lower mentality but by truth and beauty and a self-determining autonomous moral will. In the German concept of *Kultur*, according to Aurobindo, the emphasis was not merely on the acquisition of a set of intellectual generalizations but on the ordering and arrangement of life and society "by ideas based on the truths of life".[3] The general tone and temper of modern European civilization, however, has been vitalistic and hence it did not represent the genuine ideals of cultural advance. Aurobindo says: "It must be our definite verdict upon it that it was inferior as an age of culture to ancient Athens, to Italy of the Renascence, to ancient or classical India. For great as might be the deficiencies of social organization in those eras and though their range of scientific knowledge and material achievement was immensely inferior, yet they were more advanced in the art of life, knew better its object, and aimed more powerfully at some clear ideal of human perfection."[4]

Cultural manifestations can lay emphasis on the diverse aspects of a man's intellectual, moral or aesthetic development. In the old religion of the Jews there was prevalent a strong ethical puritanism and this same trend was also visible in the early form of Christianity. Sparta and republican Rome also had a serious moral orientation to life. On the other hand, Periclean Athens was marked by a predominant emphasis on

[1] *The Human Cycle*, p. 99.
[2] *The Spirit and Form of Indian Polity*, pp. 2-3.
[3] *The Human Cycle*, p. 58.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 111.

the aesthetic element,[1] Aurobindo's typology of ethical and aesthetic culture is comparable to the distinction that Arnold made between Hebraism and Hellenism. The history of ethical progress in Europe represents a struggle between the Greek concept of aesthetic beauty and the Christian theory of ethical rigor.[2] According to Aurobindo, there are four concepts which indicate the gradations in Greek ethical thought.[3] First, the concept of *Eupreps* — that which is externally attractive and seemly. Secondly *Dikaion* — that which is in accordance with justice or *dike* and convention or *nomos*. Thirdly, *Agathon* — the good which represents a combination both of the seemly and of the just. Fourthly, *Kalon* — the purely beautiful. This was the highest criterion. Hence Greek aesthetics did not resemble Bohemianism or the revelry of Restoration England, but behind its idealization of external phenomena and figures there was always an attempt to express some philosophic truth.[4] Therefore even in the creations of the great artists like Phidias there is "a certain divine calm of impersonality or universalized equality".[5] Aurobindo distinguishes between the philosophical, aesthetic and political mind of Hellas and the scientific, economic and utilitarian modern mind,[6] but he considers both spiritually deficient because they accept a mentalized physical life and reason as the highest crystallization of man's development and social progression.

Aurobindo pleads for a synthesis of aesthetic and ethical cultures. In spite of a severe ethical orientation Rome and Sparta betrayed a hostility to artistic, literary and philosophical developments and to the amenities of human existence. Rome distrusted the wisdom of Greece, and under Spartan influence Plato shows a great hostility to artists and poets.[7] On the other hand, the unusual engrossment of Athens in aesthetic pursuits

[1] *The Human Cycle*, pp. 115-7.
[2] *The National Value of Art*, p. 27.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 25.
[4] For a philosophic discussion of Beauty see: E.F. Carritt, *What is Beauty* (Oxford 1932); *Philosophies of Beauty* (Oxford, 1931); S. Alexander, *Beauty and Other Forms of Value* (London, 1933); H.G. Marshall, *The Beautiful* (London, 1924); B. Croce, *Aesthetics* (1901); *A Breviary of Aesthetics* (1913); *New Essays in Aesthetics* (1920); K.C. Pandey, *Comparative Aesthetics*, (Banaras, 1956).
[5] *The Significance of Indian Art*, p. 62.
[6] *The Human Cycle*, p. 152.
[7] *The Republic*, X, 598; III, 392-98.

led to her fall because "without character, without some kind of high or strong discipline there is no enduring power of life. Athens exhausted its vitality within one wonderful century which left it enervated, will-less, unable to succeed in the struggle of life, uncreative".[1] Although later on the Hellenic mind and the Athenian traditions of philosophy gave to Rome "the great Stoic system of ethical discipline which saved her in the midst of the orgies of the first imperial century",[2] Athens could not and did not practice ethical culture herself. The Renaissance in Italy further shows the weakness of a purely aesthetic orientation. In spite of its intellectual inquisitiveness and scientific curiosity the Renaissance, because of its blindness to moral values and high truth and thought, led to the weakness of Italy. "The subsequent prostration and loose weakness of Italy was the inevitable result of the great defect of its period of fine culture, and it needed for its revival the new impulse of thought and will and character given to it by Mazzini."[3] Aurobindo wants the synthesis of beauty and ethics to be attained by force of reason and will.[4] It is to be an integration of what the Upanishads called Tapas and Ananda.[5] Tapas represents the cosmic power creating, energizing and maintaining the world. Ananda represents the principle of all-delight and bliss. Love, joy and beauty are its threefold fundamental cosmic determinations. Europe has concerned itself with only the two lower manifestations of Ananda — pleasure and aesthetic beauty, and has neglected the aspect of a deeper secret of universal delight; therefore she has not been able to develop a powerful religion of her own.[6] Aurobindo pleads for a harmonization of ethics and beauty which are the respective manifestations of Tapas and Ananda. He says: "We can enlarge the sense of ethics by the sense of beauty and delight and introduce into it, to correct its tendency of hardness and austerity, the element of gentleness, love, amenity, the hedonistic side of morals; we can steady, guide and strengthen the delight of life by the introduction of the necessary will and austerity and self-discipline which will

[1] *The Human Cycle*, p. 101. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 119-20. [3] *The Human Cycle*, p. 119.
[4] Cf. George Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty* (1896, Dover Publications, New York, 1955) p. 270: "Beauty is a pledge of the possible conformity between the soul and nature and consequently a ground of faith in the supremacy of the good."
[5] *The Human Cycle*, pp. 121-2. [6] Sri Aurobindo, *Heraclitus*, pp. 59-60.

give it endurance and purity."[1] Therefore in the perfect society there will be a complete appreciation of beauty and its integralization with ethics. We cannot help feeling that the great emphasis which Aurobindo places on aesthetics and beauty indicates Hellenic influence on him. Plato formulated the concept of absolute and eternal beauty. Aristotle also recognized beauty to be an element in the best polity. According to the Greeks the essence of beauty was in geometric proportion and harmony. There are a few references in the Vedas to the world being a great poem — *devasya kavyam*; but nevertheless the Greeks were the people who put the supreme emphasis on beauty. In spite of Northrop's insistence on an indeterminate aesthetic continuum as the key concept in Eastern thought, culture and art[2], I fail to find the great role of the purely aesthetic factor in ancient Hindu art and philosophy. Therefore the idea of combining ethics and beauty definitely reveals Aurobindo as a synthesizer of the Indian and Greek ideals of culture.

(*b*) *Beyond Culture: The Suprarational Beauty and the Suprarational Good*

But even this synthesis of ethics and culture is at the mental and intellectual level. As a mystic, Aurobindo would not consider this as the final consummation of man's creative achievements. Both beauty and ethics have their genesis in infrarational sources[3] with a vague sense of appreciation of the pleasant and the right. They assume a rational form at the level of cultural integration. But even when they are synthesized by the human faculty of reason and intelligent will one does not advance beyond the sphere of reason. There is, however, the suprarational side of man and in the seeking and realization of the suprarational good and the suprarational suprasensuous absolute universal beauty, will lie the final aim and end of man.[4] This

[1] *The Human Cycle*, p. 121.
[2] F.S.C. Northrop, *The Meeting of East and West* (New York, 1947), pp. 375-81.
[3] *The Human Cycle*, p. 187.
[4] Cf. Robert Bridges, "The Testament of Beauty":
Beauty is the highest of all these occult influences,
The quality of appearances that thru' the sense
Wakeneth spiritual emotion in the mind of man.
According to Plotinus also beauty is the expression of supreme divine reason.

suprarational approach involving the spiritual transcendence of culture reveals that Aurobindo is not primarily a cultural historian or anthropologist but fundamentally a seeker after God and the divine light and power and bliss. This concept of cultural transcendence which has been developed at a mystical and spiritual level in Aurobindo we find substantiated at a philosophical level in Hegel. According to Hegel, the formative process of culture is the means whereby an individual gets objective validity and concrete actuality. Hegel says: "The estrangement of the spirit from its natural existence is here the individual's true and original nature, his very substance. The relinquishment of this natural state is, therefore, both his purpose and his mode of existence."[1] Individuality moulds itself by means of culture to its inherent being. Culture is the totality of the processes by means of which the inherent becomes explicit and objectified.[2] But the spirit has to be conscious of its true self. Absolute freedom is the stage where the alienated and estranged spirit "has gone back completely into itself, leaves behind this sphere of culture, and passes over into another region, the land of the inner or subjective moral consciousness (*moralischen Bewusstsein*)".[3] This concept of cultural transcendence we also find in Berdyaev who pleads for an inward organic-spiritual transfiguration of life beyond culture.[4]

This idea of cultural transcendence, as found in Aurobindo, Hegel and Berdyaev, appears, more or less, highly elusive. Although there is a dissatisfaction not only with civilization but also with culture in several quarters, the concrete tangible steps for its transcendence are not specific from an objective and sociological standpoint. Either man has to become a Yogi according to Aurobindo, or to study the metaphysics of the spirit according to Hegel, or to believe in the supremacy of the tenets of the Russian Orthodox Christianity according to Berdyaev. None of these goals appear satisfying to the modern intellectual.

[1] Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind* (E.T. by J.B. Bailli, London, 1931), pp. 514-5.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 514-5.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 512; for Hegel's distinction between formalistic culture and a conceptualistic philosophy, see *The Philosophy of History* (by Hegel), p. 68.
[4] N. Berdyaev, *Solitude and Society*, p. 151; *The Meaning of History*, pp. 222-4.

Culture, in spite of all its shortcomings, has had in the course of its manifestation throughout the centuries a degree of objective communicability and linguistic or symbolic power of predication which have made possible its transmission, and often whole groups and societies have been rescued for culture. But mysticism in spite of its acceptance by several great men and women in various countries and civilizations lacks a social process for generalizing and concretizing its achievements. It is highly individualistic, subjective and esoteric. Hence Aurobindo's theory of a suprarational good and suprarational beauty beyond culture remains, after all, a transcendental category and not a generalized sociological concept.

5. DECLINE AND FALL OF CIVILIZATIONS AND CULTURES

Aurobindo has also formulated a theory of the decline and fall of cultures and civilizations. In consonance with the generally prevalent nineteenth century organic theories he conceives of "a cycle of birth, growth, youth, ripeness and decline" for the life of society. If the stage of decline persists for a long time without being arrested then the society will perish[1] as a man dies of old age. But he thinks that there can be a renewal and recovery of the life of the collective being. According to Aurobindo, the European theories of cycles of culture miss the spiritual source of "self-prolongation by constant self-renewal which is the principle of immortality". [2] But he finds some scope for its recognition in the growing trend in Europe towards subjectivism. But even without the spiritual source of cultural rejuvenation, it is not possible that there would be the return or recurrence of the reign of unmitigated barbarianism and the dark ages because the growth of science and technology has equipped culture with the means of self-perpetuation.[3] Modern civilization and culture can crush the invasions of primitive and barbarian tribes and races. Hence it is not possible that a phenomenon similar to the invasions of the Teutons, the Goths and the Vandals is going to be repeated.

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *The Spirit and Form of Indian Polity*, p. 19.
[2] *The Human Cycle*, p. 276.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 91.

In analyzing the causes that lead to the disintegration of civilizations and cultures Aurobindo emphasizes the loss and exhaustion of internal strength and vitality and not the external migrations and invasions of barbarians and foreigners.[1] Both the Mughal empire in India and the Roman empire provide illustrations of the process of internal disintegration.[2] Although Stoicism and Christianity saved Rome for some time, because without them she could not have survived even that long, the people residing in the territories and provinces of Rome were exhausted and had lost their vitality. Rome was weakened by the division between the eastern and western parts of her empire. Her centre of life had been fading and "it was not till this central life faded that the pressure of the barbarian world without, to which its ruin is wrongly attributed, could prevail over its magnificent solidarity".[3] The Roman empire crushed the vitality and the incipient individuality of the provinces. She almost killed the spirit of the people of Gaul, Spain and Africa. Rome could not withstand the barbarians when she herself was seized with forces of internal decline.[4] She had not taken care to generalize the virtue and gift of culture and education in the territories she ruled over and "civilization can never be safe so long, as confining the cultured mentality to a small minority, it nourishes in its bosom a tremendous mass of ignorance, a multitude, a proletariat".[5] Therefore the ancient European nations who sacrificed their creativity and independent life for the doubtful advantage of the organization, peace and order, security and material comforts provided by Rome, had to pay heavily when the Goths and the Vandals and the Teutons spread like an advancing tide over Europe.[6]

Aurobindo's theory of the decline of civilizations and cultures has some remarkable similarities to the Spenglerian morphology of world history. Spengler traces the origin of culture to the spiritual force of the proto-soul. Aurobindo finds even in the

[1] For the controversy between the Externalistic and the Immanentistic theories of socio-cultural change, see P. A. Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Dynamics* (New York, 1941), vol. IV, pp. 587-668.

[2] *The Spirit and Form of Indian Polity*, p. 89.

[3] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 44-5.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 111.

[5] *The Human Cycle*, p. 90.

[6] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 6; *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 20.

primitive stages of humanity the operation of occult and lower vital intuitional forces which are only the hidden and subordinate operations of the involved spirit. But Spengler in his concept of the spirit shows the influence of Goethe and Nietzsche and therefore he does not conceive of a transcendent ultimate as Aurobindo, because of the Vedantic influence, does. Both Spengler and Aurobindo accept that the exhaustion and loss of spiritual forces lead to the decline of culture-cycles. But Aurobindo thinks that dynamic efforts at the concretization of the spiritual force in social and political life can save civilizations for vast stretches of time. Whereas in Spengler one finds a spirit of cosmic pessimism, in Aurobindo there is a profound optimism. Western civilization, according to Spengler, has entered the last phase—the stage of civilization—and it is the prelude to decline. In Aurobindo there is a deep and profound hope for the East because of its subjectivistic and spiritual tendencies. European history, he feels, does not fully realize "the importance of souls" and has put the central emphasis on action[1] and gain which has led to the dominance of commercialism and war. This can only be ended by awakening the spirituality of the people.[2] A great challenge to the mechanical economism of the West he finds in the rise of the vitalistic and voluntaristic philosophy in Germany and France. According to Aurobindo, Nietzsche and Bergson are the two great heralders of a new type of orientation to civilization.[3] The revival of the East can possibly generate some increased subjectivity and dynamic spirituality which will be a tremendous force in the world.

The final solution to the problems of man and life and society would be provided neither by a subjective idealism nor by a rationalized integration of beauty and ethics. Through the "subjective period of humanity", "man has to circle back towards the recovery of his deeper self and a new upward line or a new revolving cycle of civilisation". Hence Lamprecht's socio-psychological theory of history has to be supplemented with a spiritual metaphysics. This is the conviction and faith

[1] Sri Aurobindo, "Historical Impressions." *op. cit.* p. 166.
[2] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 264-5.
[3] *The Human Cycle* (American edition), p. 24; *The Renaissance in India*, p. 59.

which Aurobindo's book, *The Human Cycle*, provides. Although the social and economic institutions of man are governed by his psychological demands and possibilities the supremacy of the spirit is unquestioned both in Aurobindo's metaphysics and his socio-political philosophy.

6. CONCLUSION

The theory of civilization and culture as formulated by Aurobindo has significant merits. Aurobindo is justified in emphasizing the necessity of ethical factors for the growth of a true and harmonious culture. Ethics leads to the stabilization of a cultural system, because conformity with ethical norms helps to conserve the energy of an individual and a nation. Albert Schweitzer, who uses the two terms culture and civilization interchangeably, also strongly stresses the need for an ethical foundation for cultures.[1] Mere pursuit of *Machtpolitik* or of aesthetic and vital enjoyments results in the dissipation of energies, and may lead to ultimate frustration and even extinction. The warning of Schweitzer and Aurobindo is very well-timed because epicureanism, sensationalism and a hectic struggle for economic supremacy are compelling men and nations to be unmindful of the great moral forces that build the character and history of peoples. Aurobindo's analysis is a special warning to India because she is passing through a period of formless transition, when she has not adequately recovered her old values and traditions, and when there is a colossal confusion in the country about the essence of the vitality of the Western peoples. Having inadequately grasped the real and solid inspiring forces behind the phenomenal world-supremacy of Western civilization, the Indian intelligentsia is busy copying the superficial aspects of the West. The supreme emphasis laid by Aurobindo on the moral governance of life and society, if we want endurance and purity, reveal his personality as a sage and prophet. He has stressed the transcendence of instinctive vitalism and sensationalistic hedonism by an ethical culture based on discipline, character and cultivation of a strong will for the realization of the spiritual values.

[1] P.A. Sorokin, *Social Philosophies of an Age of Crisis*, p. 177.

Aurobindo is justified in his analysis of culture and civilization to the extent that he wants a transcendence beyond the mechanical outlook in the planning of a more perfect human society. He wants the enshrinement of human and divine values. Against the mechanical rationalism of classical economists, the Physiocrats and the Benthamites, we find in Western political thought also a reaction against too much scientific and purely quantitative analysis of social processes. The Austrain school of economics introduced the subjective factor in economic calculation. Rickert and Dilthey have referred to the valuational character of the social sciences and spiritual philosophies. Aurobindo has rightly drawn a distinction between civilization and culture. To the extent that Aurobindo broadly identifies civilization with the spirit of science and equates the concept of culture with the spirit of humanities he is in line with some of the dominant schools of Western philosophical and political thought which also react against positivism and scientism. A non-teleological political science, content only with the analysis of political processes and the dynamics of power, is not enough. Man is the centre of enquiry. The dominant need of the hour is the integral realization by man of the valuational factor in the social sciences.

But there are some drawbacks in Aurobindo's analysis. Aurobindo wants to go beyond an aesthetic-ethical culture to a rational culture. He would be satisfied not even with rational progress but emphasizes the subjectivistic and spiritual pursuit of a suprarational good and suprarational beauty. In its political and social implications this conception involves almost an etherealization and spiritual transfiguration of the historical process. Even if such a process of spiritual transformation were possible it could be said that perhaps the imperative necessity today is not so much to spiritualize cultural trends and orientations and to contemplate the ontological significance of cultural symbols, but to devise a social and political mechanism to disseminate the fundamental achievements of civilization and culture amongst the vast masses of humanity who are living almost on the level of primitivism and semi-civilization. In the course of its historical evolution culture has been the monopoly of the elect. It has had a conservative disdain for the common

man and his aspirations. In its aristocratic romanticism and reticent aloofness it has been content to neglect the vast millions of human beings living in dust and soil. If all beings are reflections of the divine spirit it is of supreme necessity that the human right to culture should be made a concrete reality. Its further possible spiritualization may reveal the unfathomed splendours of the spirit to a few but it would still further remove culture from contact with social reality, and its numerous contradictions and problems. I feel, therefore, that the great pressing problem before mankind is not so much to work for the religious and transcendental transformation of culture but to democratize culture. Such a democratization and popularization of cultural values will lead to its social objectification and perhaps even to the discovery of hidden forces of inward inspiration from the masses of humanity.

As in Aurobindo's philosophy of history so also in his philosophy of culture and civilization we find dearth of historical details. Aurobindo deserves full credit to the extent that he is the one foremost Indian thinker who has tried to develop a philosophy of history and culture on the basis of a vast metaphysical structure. From the standpoint of being a pioneer he is entitled to our gratitude. But when we compare the sociological analysis in *The Human Cycle* and *The Ideal of Human Unity* with the great mastery of factual details in Pareto's *Mind and Society*, Max Weber's *Religionssoziologie*, Spengler's *The Decline of the West* or Toynbee's *A study of History* we cannot help feeling that some more documentation and empirical substantiation would have strengthened the force of Aurobindo's generalizations. After having studied the books of Western sociologists and philosophers of history, when one turns to Aurobindo one always feels the stamp of the *obiter dicta* in his writings. For example, to support his generalized statement about the power of the spirit to save cultures from decline, he mentions the examples of China and India.[1] With regard to India, there are, of course, scattered references in his writings to the galvanizing force of the spirit in the historical process; but he is absolutely reticent about details concerning China. A student of the comparative

[1] *The Spirit and Form of Indian Polity*, pp. 18-9.

philosophy of culture will be interested in knowing how and when the spiritual element has helped the Chinese people in the course of their history. The absence of factual details as the basis for historical and empirical generalizations would seriously weaken the force of some of his arguments for those who are not believers in his system of metaphysics and Yoga.

CHAPTER THREE

SRI AUROBINDO'S THEORY OF NATIONALISM AND THE IDEAL OF HUMAN UNITY

1. SRI AUROBINDO'S ACHIEVEMENTS AS A NATIONALIST LEADER

(a) *The Political Career of Sri Aurobindo*

IN his speeches and writings during his active political career (1905-1910), as also in subsequent writings in his famous philosophical journal *Arya*, Aurobindo expounded the principles of nationalism. His writings as well as his lofty spiritual and moral character were very powerful assets in creating in Bengal the movement of "New Nationalism", — new as distinguished from the prevailing politics of the Moderates. It is said that he began his silent political activity in 1900. In 1900 he sent Jatin Banerjea, who had been employed in the Baroda army, with instructions for preparing the ground for political action in Bengal. He attended the annual session of the Indian National Congress in 1904 at Bombay. But it was the partition of Bengal, which was legally instituted on September 29, 1905, which gave him the necessary opportunity to give up his lucrative post as a professor in Baroda and plunge completely into political life. Soon he became one of the leaders of the Nationalist Party in Bengal, and became the editor of the *Bande Mataram* which had been started by Bipin Chandra Pal. Along with Tilak and Pal he began to preach the cult of an exalted nationalism.[1] The programme of the Nationalist Party, or the Extremists as

[1] In a message on August 14, 1947, Sri Aurobindo stated that one of his greatest dreams was a free and united India. "The first of these dreams was a *revolutionary movement* which would create a free and united India."—*Messages of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother* (Pondichery, 1949), pp. 5-6 (Our italics). Aurobindo wrote a series of nine articles entitled "New Lamps for Old". They were published in a Bombay weekly, the *Indu Prakash*, from August 7, 1893 to March 6, 1894. The articles were permeated with a spirit of robust and ardent nationalism. Criticizing the Congress he had written: "The National Congress was not really national, and had not in any way attempted to become national. . . . The Congress which represents not the mass of the population but a single and a very limited class . . . could not honestly be called national." According to Aurobindo it was a representative of the middle classes and not of the people. He made a call for renouncing "our crying weakness, our cowardice, our purblind sentimentalism". These quotations from the article in the *Indu Prakash* dated 28th August, 1893, have been taken from S. Mitra, *The Liberator*, (Calcutta, 1954), p. 37.

they came to be called, emphasized Swadeshi, the resort to arbitration in place of the British judicial system, and the opening of national schools and colleges.[1]

Aurobindo was appointed the principal of the National College at Calcutta in August 1906. His work was twofold; carrying on vigorous propaganda for nationalism, and teaching on national lines. He was not in full sympathy, however, with the new programme of national education and referred to some of its limitations — for example, its domination by men whose inner loyalties lay with the old ideologies. Moreover, it wanted to load the brain of the students with a mass of additional data and information without giving them adequate opportunity to absorb and assimilate that. It made no attempts to strengthen the body and brain of the student community.[2]

In pursuing the active career of a nationalist leader Aurobindo had to suffer imprisonments and persecutions. In 1907 he was prosecuted for sedition but was acquitted. He was present at the famous Surat Congress of 1907 which he called the "battle of Kurukshetra". He presided at some of the most important meetings of the Extremist group at Surat which were addressed by Tilak. In January 1908 Aurobindo visited Poona with his Yogi guru Lele. He delivered a speech in the Gaikwad Wada, the residence of Tilak. He emphasized the spiritual significance of the nationalist movement in Bengal. In 1908 he was suspected as involved in the Alipore conspiracy case. He was arrested on May 5, 1908. He was detained as an undertrial prisoner for one year in the Alipore Jail. It was there, in the darkness of cell-life, that he underwent a profound spiritual transformation. After his return he declared that in prison he had had a vision of God,[3] of Narayan Krishna, who had given him a message — to preach to India and the world the glories of Sanatana Dharma. He now began editing the *Karmayogin* and the *Dharma* and in their columns he powerfully and eloquently preached the revivalistic and messianic gospel of

[1] The Programme of the Nationalist Party was called the *Chatuhsutri*:— (*i*) Swaraj, (*ii*) Swadeshi, (*iii*) Boycott and (*iv*) National Education.

[2] Sri Aurobindo, *The Brain of India*, pp. 10, 29.

[3] Sri Aurobindo, *The Uttarapara Speech*, p. 9: ". . . and as I looked at them I saw Vasudeva, it was Narayana whom I found in these darkened souls and misused bodies".

nationalism. In 1910, under what he calls an imperative call or *Adesha* from God,[1] he left for Chandernagar and then for Pondichery where he lived in retirement till his death on December 5, 1950. During the short but vigorously active, almost meteoric political career that Aurobindo had,[2] he earned a great and lasting reputation.[3] He had begun to be considered the lieutenant of Tilak.

Subhas Chandra Bose was greatly influenced by the noble self-sacrifice of Aurobindo and he has definitely stated that Aurobindo was the most popular leader in Bengal during his (Subhas's) under-graduate days. He had immense influence in spite of his voluntary retirement from politics since 1910. His associations with Tilak had given him all-India fame and popularity. Tilak was affectionately called *Baradada* (elder brother) and Aurobindo, *Chhotadada* (younger brother).[4] Subhas Bose says that by 1913 Aurobindo had become a legendary figure, and his political and spiritual gospel was spreading in Bengal through his letters and writings in the *Arya*.[5] In a letter to his elder brother written in February 1921, Subhas Bose points out: "the path of Aurobindo Ghosh is to me more noble, more inspiring, more lofty, more unselfish, though more thorny than the path of Ramesh Dutt".[6] When Subhas Bose finally decided to give up the career of an Indian Civil Servant and dedicate himself completely to the cause of India's freedom, it was also under Aurobindo's influence, silently exercised. Wrote Subhas: "The illustrious example of Aurobindo Ghosh

[1] *Aravinda-Mandira-Me* (in Hindi), pp. 84-6.

[2] In July 1909, Sri Aurobindo had outlined a six-point programme for the Nationalist Party. This programme is significant from the standpoint of his political thought. It is as follows: (*i*) Persistence, with a strict regard to law, in a peaceful policy of self-help and passive resistance. (*ii*) The regulation of our attitude towards the Government by the principle of "No control, no co-operation". (*iii*) A rapprochement with the Moderate party wherever possible and the reconstitution of a united Congress. (*iv*) The regulation of the Boycott Movement so as to make both political and economic boycott effective. (*v*) The organization of the Provinces, if not of the whole country, according to our original programme. (*vi*) A system of co-operation which will not contravene the law and will yet enable workers to proceed with the work of self-help and national efficiency, if not quite so effectively as before, yet with energy and success.

[3] Acharya Narendra Deva says in *Bauddha Dharma Aur Darshana* (in Hindi, Patna, 1956), p. 62, that he was specially influenced by the articles of Sri Aurobindo in the *Bande Mataram*.

[4] Subhas Chandra Bose, *An Indian Pilgrim*, p. 71.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 72. [6] *Ibid.*, p. 129.

looms large before my vision. I feel that I am ready to make the sacrifice which that example demands of me."[1]

Aurobindo had originally retired from politics in order to obtain increased spiritual strength and vitality for eventual use in the cause of India's independence. But the encompassing and evergrowing depths and complex splendours of spiritual life demanded his total absorption in them. He could not come back to politics. In a letter written to Romain Rolland, Aurobindo explains the causes of his withdrawal from politics: "India possesses in its past, a little rusty and out of use, the key to the progress of humanity. It is to this side that I am now turning my energies, rather than towards mediocre politics. Hence the reason for my withdrawal. I believe in the necessity for Tapasya."[2]

Even after leaving active politics, Aurobindo retained his interest in politics. Through interviews and through occasional messages he continued to give his opinions on political problems. In the pages of the *Arya* he wrote several series of sociological and political articles; most of them have been published also in book form. He wrote two important books on political and social philosophy: *The Human Cycle* and *The Ideal of Human Unity*. *Ideals and Progress*, which also like the other two first appeared in the pages of the *Arya*, contains his idealistic approach to political and historical problems. Hence, while in his pre-Pondichery days Aurobindo was primarily a nationalist leader and political prophet, in the Pondichery days he assumed the role of a political and social thinker and philosopher, although the major part of his attention was given to spiritualism and Yoga.

Even after his retirement, Aurobindo's views, writings and personality continued to exercise political influence. In his book *Young India*, Lala Lajpat Rai refers to the greatness of Aurobindo's spiritual character and testifies to the fact that Aurobindo had fathomed the depths of politics since he had gone to its roots, and he believed that education and Dharma could not be separated from politics.[3] Lala Lajpat Rai had

[1] Subhas Chandra Bose, *An Indian Pilgrim*, p. 130; Zacharias, *Renascent India*, p. 296, refers to the "unbridled swadeshism of Tilak, Aurobindo, Gandhi and Subhas".
[2] R. Rolland, *Prophets of New India*, II, p. 340.
[3] Lala Lajpat Rai, *Taruna Bharata* (In Hindi), pp. 121, 150.

also a personal interview with Aurobindo in 1925. In June 1923 Deshbandu C. R. Das, who had eloquently defended Aurobindo in the Alipore case of 1908, had an interview with Aurobindo in Pondichery. C. R. Das had expressed in the course of that interview the feeling that he would not like the British to go out of India unless the vexed and perplexing question of communal differences was settled.[1]

In 1918 Aurobindo wrote the introduction to the *Speeches and Writings of Tilak* wherein he referred to the nationalistic significance of Tilak's researches in Vedic and Aryan antiquities and his monumental commentary on the Gita. He regarded Tilak not as a revolutionist but as a democrat with great mass influence who had definitely Indianized the political movement. In this introduction he expressed his great faith in the eventual success of India's efforts for achieving independence. "Indeed the presence of three such personalities as Mr. Tilak, Mrs. Besant and Mr. Gandhi at the head and in the heart of the present movement should itself be a sure guarantee of success."[2]

After the death of Tilak, in an interview with Motilal Roy of the Chandernagar Pravartaka Sangha, Aurobindo said that Gandhi was the destined leader and nobody could stand against him.[3] In an interview with the correspondent of the Madras *Hindu* Aurobindo stressed the need for Tapasya for the all-round development of the people of this country. He stated that India should show the way to human unity.[4] In 1942 Aurobindo supported the Cripps offer.[5]

Even as a mystic and a leader in the realm of the spirit

[1] *Messages of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, Second Series*, pp. 17-18.

[2] Sri Aurobindo, *Bankima-Tilak-Dayananda*, p. 37.

[3] *Aravinda Mandira Me* (In Hindi), pp. 84-5.

[4] Noted in Lala Lajpat Rai, *Taruna Bharat* (In Hindi), pp. 147-9.

[5] In a message to Sir Strafford Cripps on March 31, 1942, Sri Aurobindo stated: "As one who has been a nationalist leader and worker for India's independence... I wish to express my appreciation of all you have done to bring about this offer. I welcome it as an opportunity given to India to determine for herself, and organize in all liberty of choice, her freedom and unity, and take an effective place among the world's free nations. . . . In this light, I offer public adhesion, in case it can be of any help in your work." *Messages of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother* (Pondichery, Sri Aurobindo Ashrama, 1949), p. 1. Aurobindo possibly sent messages to C. Rajgopalachari and Dr. Moonje regarding the proposals of Cripps. It is said that he also sent a personal messenger to the Working Committee of the Congress to impress upon them the wisdom of accepting the Cripps offer.

Aurobindo retained a very soft corner for the issues of independence and unification of India.[1] In his *magnum opus*, *The Life Divine*, there are occasional references to the mighty spiritual and intellectual achievements of ancient India. His great book *Savitri* also enshrines an old Indian legend of the great epic the *Mahabharata*. The message which he sent at the death of Gandhi contains his prophetic faith in the glory and greatness of India. "... the light which led us to freedom, though not yet to unity, still burns and will burn on till it conquers. I believe firmly that a great and united India is the destiny of the nation and its peoples. The power that brought us through so much struggle and suffering to freedom will achieve also, through whatever strife or trouble, the aim which so poignantly occupied the thought of the fallen leader at the time of his tragic ending; as it brought us freedom, it will bring us unity. A free and united India will be there and the Mother will gather around her sons and weld them into a single national strength in the life of a great and united people."[2] This statement will dispel the rather inadequate view that Aurobindo was completely lost to politics after his retirement.

(*b*) *Aurobindo and Mazzini*

It is difficult to pronounce categorically on the political role and achievements of Aurobindo.[3] One of his biographers compares him to Mazzini.[4] Mazzini wanted the political unification of Italy through revolution. He strongly favoured the creation of a republic based on universal suffrage. He also wanted to include the lower classes in the political struggle for Italian libe-

[1] In a message broadcast on August 14, 1947, Sri Aurobindo emphatically declared: "... the partition must go. Let us hope that that may come about naturally, by the increasing recognition of the necessity not only of peace and concord but of common action. ... In this way unity may finally come about under whatever form—the exact form may have a pragmatic but not a fundamental importance. But by whatever means, in whatever way, the division must go; unity must and will be achieved, for it is necessary for the greatness of India's future." *Messages of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*, pp. 6-7.

[2] Quoted in S. Radhakrishnan (Ed.), *Mahatma Gandhi*.

[3] Jawaharlal Nehru, while a student in England, confesses being stirred by "news of Tilak's activities and his conviction, of Aravindo Ghose and the way the masses of Bengal were taking the Swadeshi and Boycott pledge"—*Autobiography*, p. 21.

[4] J.C. Ghose, *Life-work of Sri Aurobindo Ghose*, p. 308.

ration. Aurobindo's main problem was to preach the cult of spiritual and moral nationalism; violence played an insignificant role in his political prescriptions. Personally he never resorted to armed activities. He did not think in terms of an organized violent proletarian or even a lower middle class revolution.

Aurobindo is not comparable to Mazzini in the intensity and range of the latter's political influence. Despite the failure of his early insurrectionary measures, it was due to Mazzini's activities carried through the "Young Italy" that all Italian political groups could combine under the House of Savoy in 1859-60 to fight the final battle of independence. Salvemini points out that Mazzini's doctrines provided direct inspiration to nationalist leaders in Poland, Bohemia, Rumania and Yugoslavia, and influenced President Wilson in the formulation of his plan for the reorganization of central Europe on a national basis.[1] Mazzini's ideals and personality tremendously inspired Indian leaders like Bipin Pal,[2] Savarkar and Lala Lajpat Rai.

But Mazzini and Aurobindo resemble in their philosophic approach to politics. In his later days Mazzini was intensely critical of Marxism for its materialistic *Weltanschauung* and throughout his writings there are constant references to God and divine help. Aurobindo also has been critical of Western mechanical economism and barbaric materialism. Mazzini, in his philosophy of history, accepted that historical evolution proceeds under divine guidance and each successive historical stage marks the revelation of a fragment of truth. Aurobindo also upholds the theory of the manifestation of the supreme reality in cosmic progression. Both Aurobindo and Mazzini think that nationalism is a stage towards cosmopolitanism and human unity and is not something ultimate in itself. Perhaps the verdict of the future historian on the comparative role and achievements of these two political and spiritual personalities will be that Mazzini is greater as a political leader; Aurobindo is greater in the realm of philosophy, mysticism and contemplative life.

[1] Salvemini's article "Mazzini" in the *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*.

[2] Bipin Chandra Pal, *Memories of My Life and Times*, (Calcutta, Modern Book Company, 1932), pp. 245-8.

2. THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

Aurobindo has attempted an analysis and evaluation of the Indian renaissance which preceded the growth of Indian nationalism. The eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in India were periods of political decline, defeat and anarchy marked by the exhaustion and near disintegration of the creative spirit in religion and art.[1] India in the nineteenth century began to imitate Europe and became forgetful of its independent achievements in the past. But in spite of general political apathy and despair the life-breath of the nation moved as a subordinate under-current in the religious movements of Bengal and the Punjab, in the political aspirations of Maharastra and in the literary activity of Bengal.[2]

The Indian renaissance in the nineteenth century had three aspects.[3] It aimed at a recovery of the old spiritual gospel contained in the sacred scriptures of the land. The researches of European Indologists were immensely valuable in the West for gaining an understanding of Indian achievements in the diverse realms of creativity; in this connexion the names of Max Muller, Deussen, Roth, Oldenberg and others will always be important. Philosophers and thinkers like Schopenhauer, Emerson, Thoreau and Royce also had great praise for India's wisdom. Several saints and mystic leaders arose in India who were not content with a mere recovery of the old wisdom at an intellectual level but who attempted to substantiate those truths of old by their own realizations and noble living. Secondly, this re-invigorated spirituality began to inspire fresh activity in the fields of philosophy, literature, art, science and other branches of intellectual enterprise. Thirdly, an attempt was made at dealing in an original way with modern problems in the light of the inspiration of a rediscovered Indian spirit and plans were made for the realization of a better social and political existence.

Aurobindo compares the Indian renaissance not to the European Renaissance of the fifteenth century which signified a seizure of Christianized, Teutonized, feudalized Europe by the

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *The Renaissance in India*, pp. 5-6.
[2] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 21.
[3] *The Renaissance in India*, p. 32.

Graeco-Roman spirit of unhindered rationalism and independent free enquiry, but to the Celtic Renaissance when Ireland wanted to go back to the older culture after a long period of English domination.[1] In his analysis of the Indian renaissance, Aurobindo puts the central emphasis on the recovery of the spiritual traditions and heritage of the past. Zacharias attributes the Indian renaissance to the dynamic interaction between older Hinduism and the new aggressive civilization of the Occident. I think that the quest for the recovery of the old Indian spirit was itself inspired by the contact with an alien civilization. The dynamic and powerful impact of the organized and aggressive Western civilization necessarily engendered a quest in the Indian mind for the spiritual source of life-philosophy; therefore the Indian thinkers turned to the old wisdom which was being preserved in a very poor and insignificant fashion in the centres of Sanskrit learning and Yogic contemplation.

The establishment of new religious sects in India Aurobindo considers to be a central event in the Indian renaissance.[2] This, I think, differentiates the Indian and the Italian movements because there was no religious orientation in the latter. The Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj, the thought of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, orthodox Hindu revivalism in several places, the neo-Vaishnavism of Bengal and the Islamic renaissance were important movements which attempted to go back to the past and recover the light of the old wisdom. Aurobindo refers to the cosmopolitanism, eclecticism, religious rationalism and logic of the Brahmo Samaj which he considers akin to English unitarianism in some forms.[3] The Brahmo Samaj had both Vedantic and Christian influences in it. Bentham saluted Ram Mohan as "an admired and beloved fellow-worker in the service of humanity".[4] Keshava Chandra Sen and Devendra Nath Thakur had also great social, intellectual and moral influence over Bengal. Of all the Indian renaissance leaders the dynamic and spiritual puissance and fervour of Dayananda appeal to Aurobindo most and the latter considers him a unique personality trying to create a vigorous Aryan manhood in India.

[1] *The Renaissance in India*, p. 3.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 52-5.
[3] *Ibid.*, Aurobindo's maternal grandfather Raj Narayan Bose was one of the leaders of the Brahmo Samaj.
[4] Albert Schweitzer, *Indian Thought and Its Development*, (New York, 1936), p. 211.

In Dayananda's reliance on Vedic wisdom — the early and pristine treasure of the old Indian seers and sages — Aurobindo discovers a national instinct; hence he says Daynanda "brings back an old Aryan element into the national character"[1] because nationalism does not mean conservatism and dogmatic inertia but is an attempt to seize on some dominant features of ancient history and galvanize them into a powerful means of fresh and original creation. Aurobindo credits the Theosophical movement for getting some recognition in the West for some of the psychic, occult and esoteric achievements of the old Hindus.[2] He considers Ramakrishna, the divine hero, to be "the man who had the greatest influence and has done the most to regenerate Bengal".[3] Vivekananda, the man with a highly developed intuitive mind,[4] whose creative work, although not commensurate with the total spiritual dynamism and magnificence of his personality,[5] proclaimed to the world that India was awake not only to exist but to conquer.[6] In India itself the role of Vivekananda was primarily that of a leader who wanted "preservation by reconstruction".[7] Aurobindo also refers to the achievements of J. C. Bose and Rabindranath Tagore in the field of Indian renaissance.

Aurobindo's own services in this work of Indian renaissance are also considerable. He has been considered the greatest synthesis of the genius of Europe and the genius of Asia,[8] a thinker in whose works the spiritual depth lacking in the works of Plato and Spinoza, Kant and Hegel, attains its resplendent fulfilment.[9] "The sage of Pondichery" as Mahatma Gandhi called him has been considered by Radhakrishnan as "the greatest intellectual of our age"[10] and a great force in the realm of spirit. Tagore who saluted Aurobindo in the early days of the latter's heroic youth found him in his later days to have realized the spirit and attained the silent richness of divine knowledge. Aurobindo believed that the ever-growing spiritual and intel-

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *Bankima-Tilak-Dayananda*, p. 43, pp. 44-5, p. 40.
[2] Sri Aurobindo, *Kya Bharata Sabhya Hai?* (In Hindi. Banaras, 1934), p. 38.
[3] Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, pp. 13-4. [4] *Aravinda Mandira Me* (in Hindi), p. 5.
[5] *Bankima-Tilak-Dayananda*, pp. 41-2. [6] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 22.
[7] *The Renaissance in India*, pp. 46-7.
[8] Romain Rolland's tribute to Sri Aurobindo.
[9] Frederick Spiegelberg's tribute to Sri Aurobindo.
[10] Radhakrishnan's tributes after the death of Sri Aurobindo.

lectual advance of India was bound to come. "The renaissance of India is as inevitable as the rising of tomorrow's sun, and the renaissance of a great nation of three hundred millions with so peculiar a temperament, such unique traditions and ideas of life, so powerful an intelligence and so great a mass of potential energies cannot but be one of the most formidable phenomena of the modern world."[1]

3. THE ORIGINS OF THE NATION-STATE

The origins of the nation and nationalism constitute a controversial problem of world history. Marxist writers consider the growth of nationalism to be a process of the rationalization of the economic interests of the bourgeoisie. Nationalism is regarded by them to be an epiphenomenon of capitalism because the bourgeoisie of one country wants to further its own gains by appealing to national sentiments and thereby tries to get rid of the competition of the bourgeoisie of other countries.[2] According to Spengler nationalism is based upon the tendency to comprehend the infinite both in the spatial and the temporal sense.[3] In the West, nations of the Western Faustian style begin to emerge with the foundation of the Holy Roman Empire by Otto the Great, and in them the primitive barbarian peoples of the early Carolingian period get quickly dissolved. Till the seventeenth century the nation-state is linked up with the dynastic idea because the king or the monarch is regarded as the symbol of national uniqueness and unity. Spengler says that the eighteenth century marks the emancipation of the national consciousness from the dynastic idea and in this process the French Revolution has a leading significance because it heralded the popular idea in place of the dynastic. Pollard considers the fourteenth century to be the first epoch of nationalism, when incipient feelings of nationalism were expressed during the Hundred Years' War.[4] It was an age of commons. The commons fought their battle with the long bow, financed

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 69.

[2] *Selected Works of Karl Marx*, vol. I, p. 210; Joseph Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question* (New York edition), p. 15.

[3] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, II, p. 178.

[4] Pollard, *Factors in Modern History*, pp. 29-30.

their wars by national wealth acquired in the wool trade and recruited their armies by national and voluntary enlistment. The emergence of the House of Commons symbolized the rise of a new middle class.

It would be historically untrue to emphasize the nationalism of the Middle Ages. As a significant force in history, nationalism begins to be important since the Renaissance and the Reformation, although the primitive sentiments and the social and affectual bonds to which it is related are found even in the old tribal days and are represented in the Hellenic conception of *Koinonia* and the Vedic concept of Jana. The critical intellectualism of the Renaissance pulverized the dogmatic ecclesiastical claims of universal papal supremacy and henceforth no Pope could dare to imitate Pope Innocent III. It indirectly attempted to place the temporal power above the spiritual authority, and the centre of gravity shifted from Rome to the different capital cities of the various countries. Machiavelli's *The Prince* represents the characteristic sentiments of national unification of the era of Renaissance. The Renaissance encouraged the process of vernacularization and therefore national cultures began to grow (in place of the Latin European Culture) which later on attained their mystical glorification in the German romantic and idealistic theory of the *Volksgeist*. The Reformation destroyed the political pretensions of the Popes, and the success of Henry VIII in England showed that nationalism was triumphing. Luther, Melancthon, Calvin and other reformers challenged the papal claims on intellectual and religious grounds. Sometimes the Reformation is considered to be the revolt of the German princes against an Italian pope. Mercantilism and the Cameralistic school of economics furthered the cause of nationalism on the economic front. Positively, they stressed that the economic interests of each nation had to be independently solidified and protected. Negatively, they revealed the tensions and struggles existing in Western Europe due to the conflict among rival nations for economic supremacy. But the world-wide significance of nationalism begins to be felt only since the French Revolution. The revolution started with the gospel of fraternity but this universalism soon narrowed down into the creed of nationalism. The doctrine of national

self-determination was proclaimed. Napoleon's conquests negatively furthered the cause of nationalism in Italy and Germany by way of their reaction against French imperialism. Conscription began to be resorted to from now on and it was a sign which indicated that the citizens owed their primary loyalty to the national state. In spite of the attempts at reaction of the Metternich system (1815-1848), the Holy Alliance and the European Concert, nationalism made tremendous headway in Europe and America. Germany and Italy were unified and the gradual process of the dismemberment of the Ottoman and Austrian empires, which started in 1825, began to lead to the emergence of separate nation-states in Europe.

Aurobindo finds traces of the first attempts to form a nationality in the Greek City, the Semitic or Mongolian monarchy, the Celtic clan and the Aryan *Kula* or *Jati*.[1] "It was the mixture of all these ideas that went to the formation of the medieval nation and evolved the modern peoples."[2]

Nationalism, according to modern sociologists, has primarily two aspects. It is a significant stage in the process of the socialization of man. The group or any social collectivity represents the totality of the inter-subjective interactions of the component members and in this sociological sense nationalism can be considered as only a more developed, extended, heterogeneous and significant form of the tribal sentiments of kinship and loyalty to the phratry and the Gens, or of the Greek concept of *Koinonia*, and the concept of 'belonging' to the Jana and the Kula. But nationalism, not merely as a social and associational bond, but as a political factor and process demanding an autonomous, independent political power of self-determination for the members bound by feelings of unity, is definitely a modern product emerging since the Renaissance and Reformation with monarchical affiliations and since the French Revolution with democratic affiliations.

In the historical process of the formation of the nation-unit Aurobindo emphasizes three factors: (*i*) the role of a strong kingship; (*ii*) the role of a fixed social hierarchy; (*iii*) the role of foreign domination. Kingship has played an important role in organizing and shaping national life.[3] The Plantagenets

[1] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 30. [2] *Ibid.* [3] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 124-5.

and Tudors in England, the Capets and their successors in France, the house of Castile in Spain, the Romanoffs and their successors in Russia, the Hohenzollerns in Germany and the Mikado in Japan provide illustrations of this phenomenon. During the period of absolutism—for example, England from Edward IV to Elizabeth, France in the Bourbon era from Henry IV to Louis XIV, Spain from Ferdinand to Philip II and Russia during the era of Peter and Catherine—there was the growth of national maturity centring round a dynastic symbol.[1] At times the monarchical authority outstretched its bounds and wanted to impose even religious uniformity on the people. Some of the Tudor and the Stuart kings in England and the protagonists of the religious wars in France and the Catholic Inquisition attempted some form of religious regimentation and authoritarianism. "Certainly it was everywhere an outrage on the human soul, but it was not merely due to any natural wickedness of the rulers; it was an inevitable stage in the formation of the nation-unit by political and mechanical means."[2] The movement of monarchical despotism failed in England and it became the only country where liberty broadened from precedent to precedent. The monarchical state, however, by concentrating the whole of national life round its own activities in several areas established the powerful tradition of the monocentral focus of the country's life. "The Church served it (the monarchical state) with its moral influence, the nobles with their military traditions and ability, the bourgeoisie with the talent or chicane of its lawyers and the literary genius or administrative power of its scholars, thinkers and men of inborn business capacity; the people gave taxes and served with their blood the personal and national ambitions of the monarchy".[3] The inner justification of this movement of concentration of authority in the hands of the monarch lay in the logic of historical evolution. But later on monarchy had to make place for republican and democratic experiments. The nation-unit exists not merely to make political existence possible but is a field for the extension of man's social activities on a large scale. When these purposes began to be served through different groups and associations and when the people began to assert itself the monarchial external shell

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 126. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 126-7. [3] *Ibid.*, pp. 127-8.

was torn and instead of that there began gradually to be enshrined the authority of the vast millions. In the evolution of the nation-unit, however, the role of kingship has to be recognized.

The growth of a solidified hierarchical social structure has also at times been partly responsible for the formation of the nation-unit. Such hierarchies are found in India, in medieval Europe, and to a small extent in China and Japan.[1] A fixed social hierarchy makes possible the effectuation of religious, economic and political unity round one specific socially dominant class and thus provides the elementary beginnings and foundation for a large organization for the purpose of common social association and collective life. Thereby it becomes a school of incipient national discipline. Such socialization is indispensable for a social and political life. Islam emphasized fraternity and equalitarianism and "the curious institution of a slavery which did not prevent the slave even from rising to the throne".[2] But Islam, in spite of its contact with the well-developed nation-units of Europe, failed to evolve a nation-unit of her own, even after the disruption of the empire of the Caliphs, because it had lacked this principle of social hierarchy which could provide a large initial effective form of common social life.[3] To the obvious query as to why India, with its classic system of social stratification enshrined in the caste system, could not evolve the nation-state, Aurobindo answers: "In medieval India it (the social order) turned towards the social dominance of the sacerdotal class and the substitution of a common spiritual for a common political consciousness as the basis of the national feeling. No lasting secular centre was evolved, no great imperial or kingly head which by its prestige, power, antiquity and claim to general reverence and obedience could over-balance or even merely balance this sacerdotal prestige and predominance and create a sense of political as well as spiritual and cultural oneness."[4]

It is true that some dominant political forms are associated with some dominant socio-economic forms but to trace a logical connection between the institution of a fixed social hierarchy

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 119-22. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 119-20. [3] *Ibid.*
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 120-1.

and the evolution of the nation-state as Aurobindo does, does not appear plausible. A class can accentuate political growth and consciousness in two ways. Either it can form an organized structure which would play the dominant role in creating a national consciousness. In Europe, for example, the bourgeoisie wanted to foster national consciousness because thereby it could pose as the champion of the interests of all sections of the population against the feudal landlords and their royal champions. But we do not find in ancient and medieval times any class which wanted to create political and national consciousness in this way. A second way in which a social hierarchy can create national consciousness is to train the people in the art of social thinking. The social class itself becomes the centre of loyalty and group-affection and thus people learn the art of progressive ego-transcendence. The habit, at least of the limited transcendence of partial and separatist interests and loyalties which makes the existence of the class as a collectivity possible, is later on transferred in the interests of the nation-unit. It is true that in the later history of Europe this has been possible. After thinking of themselves as nobles or as members of the bourgeoisie men began to think of themselves as Germans or French or Englishmen. But here also there is no logical connexion between the existence of a social hierarchy and the formation of a nation-unit because it is also possible that instead of being an element in the process of ego-transcendence the class itself could claim to be the ultimate centre of loyalty. To refute the conception of the connexion between social hierarchy and the origin of the nation-unit it may very well be said that if social stratification could lead to the formation of the nation-unit, it is surprising it should not have done so in the highly stratified societies of Egypt. Sparta and Rome also had fixed social hierarchies but no sense of nation-unit could be evolved by them. I feel that Aurobindo is merely generalizing the historical accident of modern European history where the bourgeoisie has been instrumental in loudly proclaiming the cult of nationalism into a generic all-comprehensive logic of human political evolution.

The third factor significant in the evolution of nationality and the nation-state, according to Aurobindo, has been foreign

domination.[1] The histories of Russia and England show the domination of an alien conquering group which transformed itself into a ruling class and was ultimately absorbed in the general population. Spain was ruled by the Romans, the Goths and the Moors. Italy was under the heels of the Austrian empire. The Balkans lay under the power of the Ottoman Turks and only after 1825 began to win their independence. Germany was under the yoke of France for a very brief period, of course, but the Battle of the Nations had been principally a reaction against the humiliation at Jena. France experienced Roman rule, the rule of the Teuton aristocracy and also a brief and partial conquest by England. "... in all cases the essential has been a shock or a pressure which would either waken a loose psychological unity to the necessity of organizing itself from within or would crush out, dispirit or deprive of power, vitality and reality the more obstinate factors of disunion."[2] In many European countries one can find the influence of foreign conquest and rule as a factor leading to the growth of nationality. In the history of the modern East, from Egypt to India to China and Japan, one can study the dynamic impact of the nationalistic and imperialistic Western civilization in evoking and eliciting the forces of political nationalism in Asia.

Aurobindo distinguishes the pre-national empire-building cycle of the ancient world from the modern cycle of nation-building.[3] The ancient world started with the tribe, the clan or the city state; all of them were small units. "... Greece, Italy, Gaul, Egypt, China, Medo-Persia, India, Arabia, Israel, all began with a loose cultural and geographical aggregation which made them separate and distinct culture-units before they could become nation-units."[4] There are two types of empires in history.[5] In the homogeneous national empire there is not present any sense of separatism and localism in the component units. On the other hand, in the heterogeneous composite empire the sense of ethnic and cultural particularism continues to operate. The three wars from 1864 to 1871, which unified Germany, led to the incorporation of Schleswig-Holstein and Alsace-Lorraine in the Reich, and they continued to be dissen-

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 37-8. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 37-8. [3] *Ibid.*, pp. 115-7.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 106. [5] *Ibid.*, p. 41.

tient elements in the Reich. After the incorporation of the Philippines, and of Formosa and Korea, the U.S.A. and Japan respectively assumed a conglomerate appearance. Pan-Germanism, Pan-Slavism and Pan-Islamism were ideologies with expansionist political ambitions.

There are three important differences, according to Aurobindo, between the modern cycle of nation-building and the ancient cycle of empire-building.[1] First, the ancient world, as in the case of Egypt, Assyria, Greece and Rome, developed from the local and regional unit to the imperial conglomeration without evolving the nation-unit. The modern European cycle of nation-building does not overshoot itself by proceeding towards a larger unification "to the neglect of the necessary intermediate aggregate".[2] Secondly, the European nation-building cycle represents a growing political evolution through several successive steps. Feudalism provided to Europe a period of the balancing of centripetal and centrifugal forces. The creation of metropolitan centres like London or Paris, the development of political centralization by the growth of a strong kingly power and the nascent theoretical and practical unity of Christendom fostered by the Roman Catholic Church intensified the process of political unification and progressive social harmonization without the destruction of the intermediate groups and units. But in the ancient empire-building cycle whenever political uniformity was achieved, it mainly represented an imposition from the top. Thus the empires of Assyria and Rome only succeeded in exhausting the energies of the component units. The third distinct feature in the modern European nation-building cycle is that it is marked by a process of revolt, resistance and rebellion against too much of authoritarianism. The Renaissance attacked the theorotical foundations of the scholastic, centralising Roman Church. The Reformation challenged the theological claims of the Roman Popes. The growth of world-commerce accelerated commodity-production and the rise of the newly rich middle classes led to the weakening of the feudal nobles and knights. The bourgoisie, profiting from the primitive or original accumulation of capital and the presence of landless labourers established the

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 115-7.

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 115.

new capitalistic mode of economic production based on the legal freedom of the labour contract. The Civil War and the Puritan Revolution in England, and the French Revolution and the revolutions of 1830 and 1848 in Europe, signified the dynamic activity of that resisting temper and spirit whose theoretical foundations had been supplied by the Catholic and Protestant monarchomachs and the theorists of the schools of natural right, political individualism and social contract. Hence, the history of Europe evinces a process of interaction between authority and freedom. The ancient empire-building cycle was primarily an age witnessing the sway of power and authority, at least on the external political level. The balancing and integration of political authority and local and individual freedom have led to several types of political experimentation. In the modern world, the federated nation and the federal empires of the U.S.A. and Germany, the partial decentralization movement in various countries as also the increasing use of the state machine for serving diverse national purposes, are examples of this. These multiple types of political practices and formulas were not possible in the ancient world except for minor exceptions.

Aurobindo has drawn a theoretical distinction between peoples and nations.[1] The Asiatic civilizations even during their most organized and flourishing political periods have been characterized by a predominant social, religious and cultural ethos and not by the politicism implied in the modern nation-states. They have been national "only in the sense of having a common soul-life, a common culture, a common social organization, a common political head, but not nation-states".[2] In the language of modern sociology, they were dominated by status and not by contract, they were communities and not contractual societies. In Tagore also we find a distinction between nations and peoples.[3] A nation, according to the Indian poet, is a dead and soulless machine, "an organised gregariousness of gluttony". Europe is the land of nations.[4] The East is a land of peoples who generally behave like men with

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 207-8. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 287-8.

[3] Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (Macmillan & Co., London), pp. 34-48. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, pp. 277-9.

[4] Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism*, pp. 21, 26.

a soul. Of course, Tagore's typology reflects his intense hatred of the mechanical aggressiveness of the Western despots and speculators against the Asiatics and Africans. The basic point in Tagore is that when he refers to peoples, he means to stress a state of more or less political simplicity under a broad cultural organization. He equates nations with organized, mechanical powerful states which put a predominant emphasis on political experience. On the other hand, the German writer Bluntschli and the Austrian sociologist Gumplowicz use the term people (*volk*) in a political sense because according to them there can be no people without a state.

The genesis and growth of nationalism in India has been primarily motivated by the reaction against the West. The nationalism of the East is an attempt at achieving greater social and political organization and homogeneity for fighting the West. It is a modern phenomenon. But patriotic Indian writers trace the feelings of nationalism to the Vedas. The famous hymn of the Atharvaveda which says: "The Earth is the mother, I am her son" is interpreted to be an incipient formulation of the concept of the country as the motherland.[1] Asoka is considered a fosterer of nationalism by his use of Pali or Prakrit in his inscriptions found throughout India. The anti-foreign political exploits and deeds of Chandragupta Maurya, Kharvela, Pushyamitra, the Gupta emperors, the Rashtrakutas, Pratap Singh, Shivaji, Baji Rao and other great heroes are considered to be attempts at fostering nationalism in India.[2] The great philosopher Samkara is regarded a great patriot who established four Vedantic centres in the four corners of India.[3] The Arya Samaj scholars credit Dayananda with having popularized the old Vedic concept of Svarajya. On the other hand, several Western sociologists and historians consider nationalism to be a foreign Western product absorbed by the East, and they point out the imitation of Western political phraseology and

[1] माता भूमिः पुत्रोऽहं पृथिव्याः A.V. XII. 1, 12.

[2] Jawaharlal Nehru in *The Discovery of India*, p. 319, refers to Shivaji as "the symbol of a resurgent Hindu nationalism". Warren Hastings, quoted in *The Discovery of India*, referred to the Marathas possessing a principle of national attachment. Sri Aurobindo in *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 122, refers to the national conciousness in the Rajputs, the Sikhs and the Marathas.

[3] S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, II, p. 450.

techniques in the nationalist movements of Egypt, Turkey, Persia and India. They think that the impact of the writings of Burke, Mill, Spencer and Mazzini have strengthened the modern national spirit in India. John Stuart Mill's statement, "the government of a people by itself has a meaning, and a reality; but such a thing as government of one people by another does not and cannot exist", is supposed to be one of the sources of intellectual inspiration of the nationalist resistance movement in India. Western historians refer to the great role of the intellectuals of the East, who have received their higher training in the West, in the leadership of the nationalist movements both in China and India. These intellectuals mainly interpreted Western political literature on liberty and nationalism.

In the sense of a unifying political and social bond, nationalism is not a new phenomenon in the world. It is only the modern political and sophisticated form of the old tribal bonds of kinship, the social bonds that guided the operations of the Greek *polis*, the Roman city, and the Indian Janapadas, Ganas, Samghas and kingdoms. Of course, these bonds were affectual, emotional and community-oriented. Sometimes they were ethnological. The modern bonds are political, territorial and legal, but psychologically the structure of the bonds, implying a trans-individual consciousness, is almost similar. Implying the possession of a socio-cultural sense of some kind of fundamental unity, we may trace the roots of Indian nationalism to the Vedas. But the political conception of nationalism as a movement of resistance against absolutism and feudalism, and as an ally of democracy, we certainly have to give credit to the British for having taught us. The liberating effects of the study of Western political literature, the unifying role of the English language as a vehicle of communication and the part played by technology in creating the mechanism of an organized all-India administration, have been indeed tremendous. To trace the roots of nationalism to Tukaram and Shivaji shows a blindness to the glaring facts of history which indicate that the Marathas were inspired only by a local and parochial consciousness of their own power and its expansion. The Marathas never thought in terms of "India first and India above all"

which is the essence of the nationalistic psychology. They did not want to play the role which Prussia had played in the unification of Germany or the House of Savoy in that of Italy, during the nineteenth century, but they were playing the roles of conquerors as assumed by the Normans in England or by the Teutons in Germany in the Middle Ages.

Aurobindo sometimes says that nationalism in India is eternal because Sanatana Dharma is eternal, and Sanatana Dharma is nationalism. But here he is using the terms only in a cultural and metaphysical sense. In his more historical writings he refers to pre-British national consciousness in India. He refers to the Rajputs, especially of Mewar, "to whom the Rajah was in every way the head of the society and of the nation".[1] Reflecting on the role of the Sikhs, he considers them "the people which, having attained national self-consciousness, came nearest to achieving also organized political unity" primarily because of the organization of the Khalsa by Guru Govind Singh.[2] The Marathas are credited with having "established a secular head representative of the conscious nation".[3] On other occasions, however, he considers the nation to be a modern political phenomenon.

As a historical generalization it can be stated that the consciousness of a cultural unity has been there in India and this can be seen in the literature, art, mysticism, religion and ethics of different parts of India. But political nationalism in the sense that a people linked by a feeling of common belongingness should have the power of autonomous political self-determination, is definitely a Western phenomenon. Nationalism, in the sense of patriotic anti-foreign feelings serving as the theoretical defence of a fight against alien rule, can also be traced in older history. But the notion that common cultural or historical consciousness implies the power of autonomous political decision by the people so linked up and united, is a phenomenon of modern Western civilization. The affiliation of nationalism to the democratic ideology is, of course, primarily found in England, France and America and some other countries of the Western world. Cultural nationalism, in the sense of a broad fundamental unity running throughout the history and

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 122. [2] *Ibid.* [3] *Ibid.*

culture of the peoples may be traced in the historical evolution of India. But India has taken the concept of national self-determination from the West. One can trace, according to Aurobindo, a centripetal tendency throughout Indian history. "The political history of India is the story of a succession of empires, indigenous and foreign, each of them destroyed by centrifugal forces, but each bringing the centripetal tendency nearer to its triumphant emergence. And it is a significant circumstance that the more foreign the rule, the greater has been its force for the unification of the subject people. This is always a sure sign that the essential nation-unit is already there and that there is an indissoluble national vitality necessitating the inevitable emergence of the organized nation."[1] If we were to interpret history retrospectively in the light of the achievement of independence in India today, we may discover the incipient but strong occasional tendency towards unification in Indian history. But it will be very difficult to furnish any proof from indigenous Indian literature not influenced either directly or indirectly by the West, indicating that there has ever been any sustained consciousness of all-India unity on the political plane, animating the leaders of the land. Even the great political leaders did not think in terms of one territorially-unified country activated by a common political aspiration. It is far-fetched to interpret the growth of Hindi literature in India from the sixteenth century onwards as being half-consciously a political movement. Aurobindo's attempts to credit the Rajputs, the Sikhs and the Marathas with national consciousness have to be viewed with caution. My own conviction is that nationalism implying the sense of political self-determination and independence is an imported concept throughout the East, although it is equally true that in the course of its political manifestations it has become suffused with the revived traditions of cultural and religious unity that has characterized the historical evolution of the Asian countries.

4. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF NATIONALISM

Aurobindo refers to the vital basis of the clan and the tribe.

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 36.

The foundations and the essential elements of nationality, according to him, are a geographical unity, a common past and a powerful common interest. But "a common enthusiasm coalescing with a common interest is the most powerful fosterer of nationality".[1] This notion of common enthusiasm is similar to the views of some Western sociologists and historians. According to Franz Oppenheimer, "the consciousness of nationality makes the nation and not the nation the consciousness of nationality".[2] Ramsay Muir thinks that "in the last resort, we can only say that a nation is a nation because its members passionately and unanimously believe it to be so".[3]

According to Aurobindo, unity of race, religion or language is not indispensable to nationality. Pradier-Fodere and Calvo emphasize the elements of common racial origin and language for the making of a nation. Burgess does not consider race as essential but emphasizes community of speech and geographic unity. Gumplowicz stresses the existence of *Kulturgemeinschaft* (a culture-community) for a nation. Obviously, the example of Switzerland with three languages would refute the arguments of those who consider language to be an essential and indispensable constituent of nationality. Anthropologists have denied the historicity of a pure race although some of the German philosophers of history like Spengler have stressed the original racial divergences between nations expressing themselves through cultural and civilizational differences. According to Aurobindo "it is true that nationhood still founds itself largely on the idea of race, but this is in the nature of a fiction. It covers the historical fact of a fusion of many races and attributes a natural motive to a historical and geographical association."[4] In the writings of Aurobindo one finds the word race constantly used but it always signifies the sense of people or humanity at large. At times he terms the Madrasis, the Bengalees or the

[1] Sri Aurobindo, "The Foundation of Nationality", Reprinted from the *Bande Mataram*, in the *Advent*, vol. VI, 1949, pp. 129-30.

[2] Quoted in R.M. MacIver, *Society* (Second edition), pp. 155-6.

[3] Quoted in R.M. MacIver, *Society*, p. 156.

[4] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 323. A good exposition of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual theory of nationalism is presented in A.V. Sastri, "The Psychology of Indian Nationalism", *Sri Aurobindo Circle—Fifth* and *Sixth Numbers*, pp. 171-97 (1949), pp. 208-40 (1950).

Marathas as races, but there too by the word races[1] he means people. He never accepts the biological concept of different races with their different natural propensities and souls. Several nation-states may pride themselves on their racial homogeneity as constituting the basis of their unity, but among the elements constituting nationality Aurobindo stresses not the vital principle of race but the concept of psychological unity. The older nineteenth century view of race as an element constituting a nation never appealed to him. Lecky also does not consider race to be a valid criterion of nation. But in recent Nazi anthropology and politics the element of race as a constituent or even an essential factor in nationhood received a powerful formulation. Hitler referred to the *Volkish* and racial factors[2] and was a mad enthusiast concerning the idea of the racial superiority of the Teutonic Nordics — an idea formulated on insufficient historical and anthropological grounds by Gobineau, Wagner, Chamberlain and Hans Gunther. In Hitler's interpretation of history the prime concept is race. He says that racial instincts link a people together and create civilizations. The existence of national states provides the necessary means for the race to obtain freedom and the capacity for its spiritual and moral advancement. The state is only the living organism of a nation. Sober researches in social history, anthropometry and cultural dynamics have seriously challenged the idea of race superiority advocated by Lapouge, Ammon, Galton, Karl Pearson etc. Hitler's idea of the racial nation was only a myth to capture political power and success. In the U.S.A. several races have got mixed, although the mixture between the Negroes and the whites has not yet advanced far. Nevertheless the feeling of nationality is strong in the United States. There seems to be much truth behind Aurobindo's view that race and language are not indispensable factors for the foundation of nationality.

Aurobindo lays the emphasis on the psychological rather than on the biological and physical principle as the foundation of nationality. Nationhood, according to him, refers primarily to the notion of psychological unity which, in turn, might be accentuated by common historical memories of ancient tradi-

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *The Brain of India*, pp. 6, 4; *Speeches*, p. 33.
[2] *Mein Kampf*, (Reynal & Hitchcock, New York, 1940), p. 434.

tions, past heroes and sufferings, by common geographical habitation and by common interests and values. He says: "... the nation is a persistent psychological unit which Nature has been busy developing throughout the world in the most various forms and educating into physical and political unity.... All modern attempts to destroy by force or break up a nation are foolish and futile, because they ignore the law of natural evolution. Empires are still perishable political units; the nation is immortal."[1] In Aurobindo we find emphasized the central importance of the national spirit. A dependent country can open its way to rapid political and social progress only by national liberty and the most important requisite for national liberty is "the awakening of the national spirit and the creation of the will to be free".[2] Once this will is there and a leader has been found who can crystallize, formulate and express their national will, the nation is sure to emerge into independence.[3] The increasing appreciation of the role of psychological factors in social and political phenomena has been possible in modern social sciences due to the rise of social psychology, cultural and historical anthropology, Freudianism and the writings of Lester Ward, Cooley etc. The Russian sociologist Novicow also lays emphasis on psychic factors in the formation of feelings of nationhood. There are various elements constituting nationality, but psychic factors are also very significant. A nation according to Novicow is the emergent entity of a long historical growth and is founded upon common psychic traits that can be generated through historical evolution, social interaction and progressive assimilation of diverse features and types. But Novicow and Aurobindo differ to the extent that while the former considers a common language as an indispensable prerequisite of nationality, the latter does not.

Nationalism, from the standpoint of modern sociology and psycho-analysis, indicates the inherent drive in man to conceal his loneliness, anguish, inwardness, frustrations and irrationalities in the apparent immortality and continuity of the larger collectivity. The constraining force of an external dominant

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity,* pp. 38-9.
[2] Sri Aurobindo, *Bankima-Tilak-Dayananda,* p. 31.
[3] *Bankima-Tilak-Dayananda,* p. 15.

reality like the nation makes it possible for man to forget his apparent weakness and vascillation by imagining himself to be a unit in an indissoluble nation. Therefore nationalism has to be analyzed as an emergence of the concealed depths of men into emotional activity and attitude-constellation. But this does not mean that the calculating and deliberate element in it has to be ignored. Only where there are fundamental common interests can emotions and passions be concentrated. In the analysis of the political phenomenon of nationalism, Marxism emphasizes the keenness and skill of the bourgeoisie in arousing national feelings for their own interests. But I would like to point out that some common psychological feelings must have existed beforehand. Capitalism can only *utilize* certain feelings for its own purposes; it cannot *create* them.

Although Aurobindo is emphatic in considering the psychological element as the dominant factor in the constitution of the nation, he does not support the growth of national egoism.[1] There can be various factors on which the sentiment of collective national egoism can base itself. There is the material element of a geographical territory. It is possible that sometimes certain common interests of the inhabitants, e.g., political and economic defence and security, can assume a dominant form and thereby intensify national egoism. At times cultural ethos can be emphasized and it is possible to make a cult almost of the country and its superior culture. But this type of accentuated egoism can be a political curse. Aurobindo condemns modern capitalism and imperialism[2] because in place of serving the legitimate interests of the people and the country they aggrandize the pride, insolence and chauvinism of nations and preach the dangerous slogans of race superiority. Due to the virulent operation of imperialistic jingoism, injustice, exploitation and oppression are resorted to "and by that fatal progression which the Greeks so clearly demarcated, it leads from prosperity to insolence and outrage and from insolence and outrage to *ate*, that blind infatuation which is God's instrument for the destruction of men and nations".[3] In the accentuation of national egoism Aurobindo finds the seeds of moral and political fall

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 358-9.
[2] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 31.
[3] *Ibid*.

and catastrophe. Therefore national egoism based on a false vital subjectivism has to be eliminated. The First World War, says Aurobindo, was made almost inevitable by rabid patriotic outbursts and glorifications whereby national egoism found for itself opportunities to come into collision with rival egoisms.[1]

5. THE THEORY OF THE NATION-SOUL

In place of national egoism, with its implications of national pride and arrogance, Aurobindo refers to the nation-soul. His psychological concept of nationhood always involves a reference to the spiritual factor. He does not accept a behaviourist and materialist or functional approach to the social sciences. Even when not clearly expressed, spiritual force and power is always the central theme in his political and social philosophy. He wants the subconscious power of the group-soul, which has been operating so long as a subterranean element, to be brought to the surface and made an active force. Only thus can nations realize their souls. Before the First World War attempts were made for the discovery of the nation-soul in Germany, Ireland and India.[2] The reference to Germany, however, may appear confusing because Aurobindo condemns the collective national egoism of the belligerents in the First World War. How could the same Germany be discovering her nation-soul and also simultaneously suffering from the malady of collective national egoism? But we have to distinguish between the German people and the German leadership. The German people had been recovering the soul of Germany since the Reformation. The rise of humanism, idealism and romanticism were only conscious intellectual manifestations of Germany's attempts to discover herself. According to Lamprecht, Germany entered the era of subjectivism after the Industrial Revolution. Aurobindo also refers to the new influence of subjectivism on the nationalism which had developed in the previous rationalistic era. He says: "The nascent subjectivism preparative of the new age has shown itself in the new collective self-consciousness of man in that organic mass of his life which he has most firmly deve-

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 139.
[2] *The Human Cycle*, p. 42.

loped in the past, the nation."[1] But although the German people through their music, philosophy and literature were developing a true subjectivism, the German political leaders and the German historians taught the cult of national egoism.[2]

Aurobindo develops the theory of the soul of the nation at great length. No national awakening can be powerful which is limited to a single and exclusive field. Creative activities in various forms are possible only when the soul of a nation awakens.[3] This concept of the soul of the nation Aurobindo illustrates by the historical movement of Bengal nationalism. A nation "which has once risen, once has been called up by the voice of God to rise"[4] cannot be checked, in the course of the discovery of its soul through processes of cultural creativism and political independence, by physical repression. It is under the guidance of divine leadership. Referring to the mystic transfiguration of his own life by the vision of Krishna in 1908, Aurobindo states that even in those who were opposing the movement and obstructing its successful consummation God himself was working.[5] They were not enemies but instruments. A nation or a community has to attain self-fulfilment which is possible only through dynamic participation in the glorious memories of the past and the realization and revelation of its creative potentialities in the present and the future. In almost Hegelian terms, Aurobindo says that the nation is the self-manifestation of the cosmic spirit. He states: ". . . this (society or community or nation) too is a being, a living power of the eternal truth, a self-manifestation of the cosmic spirit, and it is there to express and fulfil in its own way and to the degree of its capacities the special truth and powers and meaning of the cosmic spirit that is within it".[6]

Bengal and pre-war Ireland were attempting to realize this soul of the nation.[7] In the Bengal Swadeshi Movement there was a pronounced and conscious subjectivism. The nation was

[1] *The Human Cycle*, p. 38.

[2] In philosophy, of course, we have to make exceptions for Fichte and Hegel who taught national egoism and Teutonic superiority.

[3] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 20.

[4] Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches* (second edition, 1948), p. 99.

[5] Sri Aurobindo, *Uttarapara Speech* (Arya Publishing House, Calcutta, 1943), pp. 17-8.

[6] *The Human Cycle*, pp. 39-40.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 44.

conceived not as a territory but as a psychological or even a spiritual being, and even when political and economic motivations were prevalent it seemed that they were "instruments of self-expression rather than objects in themselves".[1] Hence the Bengal nationalist movement was not an imitation of and derivation from the West but was unique. Bengal through a galaxy of great leaders and thinkers recovered the ancient spirit of the Vedanta and Yoga and Tantra and "forced the world to hear of its spiritual personalities".[2] Spiritualism imparted to the Bengal movement a deep political consciousness. In his own speeches as a nationalist leader Aurobindo referred to the realization of God in the nation. ". . . your common Mother. That is not merely the soil. That is not merely a division of land but it is a living thing. It is the Mother in whom you move and have your being. Realise God in the nation, realise God in your brother, realise God in a wide human association."[3] ". . . the three hundred millions of people of this country are God in the nation, something which cannot be measured by so much land, or by so much money, or by so many lives. You will then realize that it is something immortal, that the idea for which you are working is something immortal and that it is an immortal power that is working in you."[4] This realization of the immortal power and spirit of the Divine Being as manifesting itself on the political plane through a rising nation was to be achieved by a total surrender and consecration of oneself to the great cause. Even poverty and obscurity were to be devoted to the motherland.[5] This notion of surrender does not imply an exhaustion of the impulse to action[6] but it emphasizes the creative role of the human subject as the instrument of the supreme Divine Being. This idea of the new national religion, laying emphasis on the realization of God in the lives of the three hundred millions,[7] was a new note in the traditions of Indian Vedanta.[8] It signified almost an apotheosis of social and national work. People were advised to see "the birth of the Avatar in the nation".[9] The emphasis on the realization of God in the

[1] *The Human Cycle*, p. 44.
[2] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 302-3.
[3] Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, p. 141.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 4.
[6] *The Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 200.
[7] *Speeches*, p. 26.
[8] According to Aurobindo, *Uttarapara Speech*, pp. 3-4, Bipin Pal also spoke about "the Lord within the nation".
[9] *Speeches*, pp. 33-4.

country through the visualization of the omnipresent "Motherhood of God" distinguishes Bengal nationalism from its European counterparts.[1]

According to Aurobindo the Indian nation was to achieve unity not by the European method of emphasis on common self-interest but by feelings of love, veneration and devotion for and to the country. Above all, the people were to be united by the feeling "that we are all sons of one common Mother who is also the manifestation of God in a United Humanity".[2] The sacred divinity manifesting in the country was to be the sole object of worship and in that process of political ritualism no alien and external interference was to be tolerated. Any submission to the illegal, coercive and violent methods of a foreign imperialism that was choking the free expression of the sacred Goddess was a weakness and a sin "against the divinity within ourselves and the divinity in our motherland".[3] Aurobindo accepted the idea of the spiritual motherland under divine supervision even in his early days. In one of his poems he says:

> Make iron of your souls.
> Yet if Bhawani wills, strength and the sword
> Can stay our nation's future from overthrow
> Till victory with Shivaji return.[4]

Also:

> And Baji knew the Goddess formidable
> Who watches over India till the end.[5]

Bankima is credited with having intuited this vision of the country as a great and divine mother who has to be realized and worshipped.[6] According to Bankim there were three aspects of the country as the divine mother.[7] The first was *Jagaddhatri* — when the goddess was seated on a tiger. This was the old

[1] *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance* (Originally published in the *Bande Mataram*. Published in book form in 1948, Pondichery), pp. 84ff.
[2] *Speeches*, p. 140.
[3] *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, pp. 62-7.
[4] Sri Aurobindo, "Baji Prabhou", *Collected Poems and Plays*, II, p. 110.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 113.
[6] *Bankima-Tilak-Dayananda*, pp. 12-3.
[7] Lala Lajpat Rai, *Taruna Bharat* (in Hindi), pp. 136ff.

form. The second was *Kali* — wearing a garland of skulls of diseased and dead children. That was the present form of the mother representing the appalling scarcity and all-round misery in the country. The third was *Durga* — the future form of the mother when she would engage in battle for the cause of her children. The great prominence of the concept of the divine motherland in Aurobindo's political speeches and in his own personal convictions reveals and reflects the strong influence of the religious traditions of India. We have referred to the *Prithivi Sukta* of the Atharva Veda where the earth is conceived as the mother. Throughout the ancient world, and especially in Egypt, Crete and the Indus Valley civilization, we find great significance attached to the cult of the divine mother. With reference to ancient Greece, Hegel says: "Among the Athenians the word Athene had a double import, suggesting, primarily, a complex of political institutions but no less, in the second place, that Goddess who represented the spirit of the people and its unity." The medieval Tantric forms of ritual in India preserved the older idea of the divine being as mother. In Hindu mythical tradition, the *Bhagavadgita* and the river Ganges are considered as the divine mother. This tradition of the conception of the divine being in the form of the mother was now used for political purposes. It not only gave a great religious orientation to the movement of nationalism but infused the people with great heroism and faith and a strong belief in the prophylactic character of the country as the mother-goddess. It acutely brings into focus the theory of the spiritual soul of the nation.

Vivekananda also, like Aurobindo, emphasized the necessity of spiritual orientation for the safety and security of nations. Although a believer in monistic universalism, Vivekananda was a hero-prophet and had a burning enthusiasm and love for India. In spite of the fact that he refused to have any connexion with politics, so great was the liberating effect of his teachings that Subhas Bose considers him the spiritual father of the modern nationalist movement in Bengal.[1] According to him each nation represents one theme in life.[2] Vivekananda criticized the

[1] Subhas Chandra Bose, *The Indian Struggle* (Calcutta, 1948), p. 35.
[2] *The Complete Works of Vivekananda*, vol. II, p. 108, vol. V, pp. 346-7.

growth of the competitive spirit among nations and insisted on the cultivation of the spiritual and moral sources of national strength.[1]

The theory of the 'nation-soul' and the concept of the nation as the self-revelation of the cosmic spirit, as found in Aurobindo, is partly similar to the concept of nationalism developed by Fichte and Hegel. Fichte broke with the liberal traditions of French rationalism and enlightenment and insisted on the supremacy of the cultural greatness of Germany. A nation, for Fichte, is a spiritual unit and is the indispensable organism for the vigorous growth of culture. But Fichte and Aurobindo differ on a very fundamental point. In his *Addresses to the German Nation* Fichte preached that the state creates the nation and this notion of Fichte had a direct influence on the Fascist political philosophy. According to Aurobindo, the nation is regarded as the manifestation of the divine mother while the state is only a mechanical contrivance assuming supremacy in a rational age.

Hegel is a strong advocate of the spiritual theory of the nation. He refers to the personality of nations which is a condition of the attainment of pure thought and knowledge.[2] The realization of personality means the explicit consciousness of oneself as an object raised by the process of reason to the level of simple infinity. Since the time Montesquieu formulated the sociological concept of the spirit of law, the concept of national genius and national spirit came to be strongly emphasized in European political thought. German humanists like Herder, German romantics like Schlegel, and Hegel, refer to the concept of the *Volksgeist.* It represents a philosophical hypostatization of the fundamental unity behind the culture and politics of a country. Hegel believes in the spirit of the nation. The art and literature, religion and philosophy of a country enable us to discover this spirit. The concrete activities and events in a country as well as wars and political and social institutions are ultimately animated by this spirit. The process of the manifestation of the *Welt-Geist* is concretized through one nation — the world-historical nation — in one epoch.[3] The *Volksgeist* which is a determinate spirit thus constitutes the foundation of the multiple

[1] *The Complete Works of Vivekananda*, vol. II, p. 65.
[2] Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, p. 35. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 347.

forms of the nation's consciousness. Both Aurobindo and Hegel are similar to the extent that they accept the manifestation of the *Welt-Geist* (in Aurobindo it is the cosmic spirit) in the historical process of the evolution of the nation. They both accept that the spirit or the *Geist* provides the central dynamic force to the other diverse activities of the nation.

But there are two vital differences between Aurobindo and Hegel. Under the influence of the philosophy of Tantra and Bankima, and partly on the basis of his own mystic experiences, Aurobindo accepts the theory of the divinity of the nation. He conceives of the nation as the manifestation of the divine mother. The German protestant (Hegel) does not refer to such notions. In Christianity the fatherhood of God, and not his aspect as the mother, is stressed. The second difference between Hegel and Aurobindo is that the latter accepts the spiritual concept of the realization of God in the nation, and also beyond the nation, in humanity. To Hegel the nation represents the crystallization of the historical manifestation of the *Welt-Geist* and so he did not accept any kind of internationalism. Sometimes Hegel also spoke of "idiosyncracy of spirit" — peculiar National Genius. "It is within the limitations of this idiosyncracy that the spirit of the nation, concretely manifested, expressed every aspect of its consciousness and will — the whole cycle of its realization. Its religion, its polity, its ethics, its legislation, and even its science, art and mechanical skill, all bear its stamp."[1] Hegel does not specify the concrete and precise content of this idiosyncracy of spirit but from the *Philosophy of Right* it appears to be a psychological principle. If so, the metaphysical outlook of Aurobindo and Hegel about the soul or spirit of a nation has similarities. But being a great advocate of the supremacy of Teutonic Christian freedom, the aggressive conclusions that Hegel drew from the concept of the spirit of the nation are not met with in Aurobindo. According to Hegel, in order that the world-historical nation might express the natural principle in the advance of the self-developing self-consciousness of the world-mind, it must not be hampered by the claims of right of other nations. Aurobindo, in his political philosophy, did never become as outspoken and fanatical as

[1] Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (Trans. by F. Sibre, New York, 1944), p. 64.

that. Hegel attributed to the nation-state, which is "mind in its substantive rationality and immediate actuality", absolute power on earth. Aurobindo does not make an absolutist apotheosis of the nation-state. Since Aurobindo accepts the idea of the divine motherhood of the nation, he is not worried by the problem of the divergence of the mutual interests of the individual and the nation. He wrote at a time when a great movement had been launched for nationalist propaganda and political agitation and the one important thing was to emphasize the strong spiritual and intellectual foundations of nationalism. The theoretical question of the priority of the respective claims of the individual and the nation becomes significant only after the nation has achieved a political and independent character. But still there is the strong implication in Aurobindo's political philosophy that he would not stand for the suppression of the separate individuals or groups of individuals by the nation. According to Aurobindo, the individual also is divine, if the nation is divine; and hence both being aspects of the same being, the nation is only a stage for the divine fulfilment of the individual. Furthermore, the Platonic-Aristotelian-Hegelian notion of the moral and political growth of the individual through the state, which has its modern parallels in the ideology of the romantic-universalist school of Austrian economics of Othmar Spann and of Oxford Idealism, has no parallel in Aurobindo.

6. NATIONALISM AS DHARMA — SATTVIKA RELIGION

The theory of the "soul of the nation" is essentially connected with the notion of nationalism as a religion or as the Dharma of the age. Aurobindo upheld that God was manifesting Himself through India, the common mother. This belief implied that all types of local and partial loyalties to the ego, the family and the class, were to be forsaken for the cause of the "larger national self".[1] The soul of India had been dormant and almost besieged by spiritual sterility in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Religion was the field for the first manifestation of the awakened and reinvigorated national consciousness. When some of the best products of Western education

[1] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, pp. 29-30.

bowed before the unsophisticated saint of Dakshineshwar it was a triumph for the spiritual soul of India.[1] Vivekananda hurled the defiance of the Vedantic spirit against the corrosive inroads of the intellectualism of Darwin, Mill and Spencer upon the mind of Indian youth. Indian nationalism, raised upon Vedantic and religious foundations, necessarily became more than a mere political and economic programme. According to Aurobindo, "nationalism is a religion that has come from God",[2] and therefore this creed has to be lived and practised in a spirit of humility and dedication and not of intellectual arrogance. The nationalism of Bengal appeared to be a divine creed full of the effulgent spirit or *Sattva* and it could not be crushed by the league of political and military forces that were arrayed against it. "Nationalism has not been crushed. Nationalism is not going to be crushed."[3] Nationalism survives in the strength of God and hence it could not be defeated, no matter howsoever invincible the forces against it might appear to be. Bengal nationalism was not the mere imitation of the European prototype. In European nationalistic movements the primary emphasis was on change of rulers and this was a physical or material change. It was to be the replacement of the rule of alien conquerors by the rule of one's own countrymen. But in Bengal, according to Aurobindo, the emphasis was not on the mere change of rulers but on an expansion and extension of one's consciousness in order to identify oneself with the activities, feelings, aspirations and happiness of three hundred millions. The primary emphasis was to be laid upon a self-transcending fraternization with one's own countrymen and on making strenuous efforts for their uplift and prosperity, instead of on a mere physical replacement of rulers. Nationalism therefore was not the mere pursuit of collective political self-interest. It was a religion of the realization of the cosmic being through the nation. Thus in its innermost nature the nationalist movement was not inspired by any self-interest. From this analysis of the transcendental and cosmic element in nationalism it appears that any advocacy of a generalized formula derived from European politics and economics that nationalism is a mere epiphenomenon of capitalism is partial and inadequate.

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 22. [2] Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, pp. 7-8. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Being a pure religion and not a formula based on mere political and economic self-interest, nationalism was intuitional and not intellectual in its form and orientation. If the external forces of nationalism were to be calculated *vis-a-vis* the military might of the Bengal Government, only despair and frustration would appear to be the outcome in a possible physical tussle between them. In face of lack of adequate physical and material strength only death and defeat would be the result if a challenge was offered to the entrenched government in the country; a merely rational analysis would dictate that nothing could and should be done. "The only conclusion is that this country is doomed. That is the conclusion to which the intellectual process will lead you."[1] But whereas intellectual deliberation only indicated despair and apathy and hopelessness, "the heart of Bengal was open and ready to receive the voice of God whenever he should speak."[2] The intellect is an impotent device for social action. It can neither inspire followers nor can it create the heroic leader. The intellect may create the critic or the scientist, the businessman or the conservative politician, but it is powerless to create the Yogi or the hero, the prophet or the messiah who can utter words of solace and courage even in the darkest days of agony, defeat and national anguish. The intellect "does not conquer nature and destiny, lay its hand on the future, command the world".[3] This emphasis laid by Aurobindo on the failure of the intellect to provide the necessary impetus and inspiration in the realm of actual political dynamics and historical creativism shows that for the rise and liberation of nations what is needed is not the scientific analysis of logical and causal interconnections but the mystic and mighty faith in the destiny of the nation. Aurobindo supports his thesis of the necessity of an intuitional faith in the destiny of the nation and the divine leadership of the country by stressing the inadequacy of mere industrial and material progress. The latter represents only the external shell. He cites the example of Rome where there was considerable material progress and development, but "when the hour of trial came, it was found that these nations which had been developing industrially, which had been deve-

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, pp. 14-7. [2] *Ibid.*
[3] Sri Aurobindo, *The Brain of India*, pp. 6-7.

loping materially, were not alive. No, they were dead and at a touch from outside they crumbled to pieces."[1] Therefore the necessity for the discovery and realization and growth of "the soul of society"[2] is imperative.

Nationalism as the religious process of spiritual self-realization and dynamic fulfilment of the nation required that its methods and techniques must also be of a moral character.[3] Hence Aurobindo emphasized the necessity of *Sadhana* and *Jnana*. *Sadhana* signifies the process of spiritual identification with the source and primal centre of spiritual energy. It would enable the political leaders and followers to establish contact with the divine being who was the ultimate leader and captain of the movement.[4] India was to succeed in the world only by the practice of the spiritual methods of self-growth and power. *Jnana* means not an acquisition of intellectual knowledge but the realization of a spiritual vision and inward perception which can enable a person to look into the depths and find out the mainsprings of action in nature and society. *Jnana* transcends the mere logical analysis of objects and phenomena by the discursive intellect. In Bengal there already existed the spirit of devotion and worship of Sakti; but if she also acquired *Jnana* she could generate a centre of potent spiritual energy which could almost transform the being of the nation.[5] Hence the brain and the character and the outlook of the nation had to be spiritually revolutionized.[6] The development of moral and spiritual techniques was bound to lead to the dissolution of the all-encompassing *Tamas*—the force of inertia, darkness, weakness and immobility, and to the victory of *Rajas* and *Sattva*—the forces of dynamic kinesis and spiritual gnosis. Commenting upon the use of the older methods of Indian spiritualism and Yoga for political purposes, Zacharias says: "Nationalism in India today is the sweet harmony between the new ideal of Mazzini and the old ideal of Sannyasa."[7] Hence "what is wanted for political leadership in India is not wealth or social position, but real self-sacrifice in the cause of the Motherland".[8] The emphasis on the use of spiritual and Yogic

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, p. 22.
[2] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 224.
[3] *Dharma Aur Jatiyata* (in Hindi), p. 23.
[4] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, pp. 17-8.
[5] *Aravinda Mandira Me* (in Hindi), p. 63.
[6] Sri Aurobindo, *The Brain of India*, p. 8.
[7] Zacharias, *Renascent India*, p. 149.
[8] *Ibid.*

methods for political action is also found in Gandhi and Subhas Bose[1] and several other Indian leaders.

Aurobindo stressed the cultivation of moral virtues and spiritual techniques, not only for the purpose of obtaining inward strength and purification but also as conservers of national vitality and power. The spirit and enthusiasm which were generated merely as reactions impelled by *Rajas* and hatred were temporary and soon got exhausted; the followers and leaders of a big political movement should cultivate the solid strength that comes from tenacity, perseverance and fraternity. In rhetorical terms Aurobindo declared that nationalism is a Dharma and at times struggle, battle and even murder could be part of Dharma, but not hatred and jealousy.[2] To readers not familiar with the metaphysics and the political philosophy of the Bhagavadgita this last statement will sound a little strange. According to the Gita, if a man could realize his spiritual identity with the absolute, and could feel that all external acts were being performed by the cosmic power or Prakriti of the Purushottama, he could attain thereby a sense of equanimity, stillness and detachment; and for the disinterested performance of his actions or *Svadharma* he could even resort to violence if that was imperative for the consummation of his enterprise. But both from the standpoint of individual moral growth and social development Aurobindo stated that jealousy and hatred should be given up.[3] Nevertheless, he was also a realist and thought that if occasionally, in a big political movement, sentiments of hatred were generated and expressed, the whole movement could not be condemned. It might be wise, as a temporary expedient, to use the force of hatred as a stimulant to aid the movement. "A partial *Adhyaropa* makes the ignorant for the moment see in the exploiters and not in the exploitation the receptacle of the hostile feeling. But like all Maya it is an usual feeling and sentiment and is not shared by those who think. Not hatred against foreigners, but antipathy to the evils of foreign exploitation[4] is the root of the boycott. If hatred is demoralising, it is also stimulating. . . . Let us discharge our minds

[1] After 1928, Subhas Bose changed his views.
[2] *Dharma Aur Jatiyata* (in Hindi), p. 78.
[3] Sri Aurobindo, *Dharma Aur Jatiyata* (in Hindi) p. 85.
[4] This statement has remarkable Gandhian affinity.

of hate, but let us not deprecate a great and necessary movement because in the inevitable course of human nature, it has engendered feelings of hostility and hatred. If hatred came, it was necessary that it should come as a stimulus, as a means of awakening. When *Tamas,* inertia, torpor, has benumbed a nation, the strongest forms of *Rajas* are necessary to break the spell, and there is no form of *Rajas* so strong as hatred. . . . [But] Already the element of hatred is giving place to the clear conception of love for the Mother as the spring of our political actions."[1]

The Aurobindian conception of nationalism as a religion has a strong resemblance to the Mazzinian conception. According to Mazzini there are two periods in man's history.[2] The Period of Individuality lasted from the times of the Greek and Roman republics to the French Revolution. The Period of Corporate Activity and Duty represents the second phase and it began after the Revolution, although traces of it could be found even before the revolutionary era. Nationality is a product of the second period. It is a spontaneous instinct planted in the heart of man by God himself. Although its political manifestations have appeared only in the later periods of European history, yet it is a permanent factor not only in the outward phenomenon of history but also in the inward moral and spiritual elevation of man. There is nothing definite to show the influence of Mazzini on Aurobindo's theory of nationalism as a religion. Perhaps the roots of that theory lie in the broad historical tradition of India itself and in the powerful and rich concept of Dharma which comprehends the totality of all social, political, intellectual, moral and spiritual activities within it. Political activities are also included under Dharma—the *Rajadharma* of the *Manusmriti* and the *Mahabharata* or the *Svadharma* of the Kshatriya according to the Gita. Therefore it appears that the theory of nationalism as a religion, as advocated by the Extremist school of political thought and especially by Aurobindo, is an extension, modification and reformulation of the older concepts of *Rajadharma* and *Kshatradharma*. *Rajadharma* referred to the totality of the activities of the king; the

[1] *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, pp. 84-5.
[2] Cf. Vaughan, "Mazzini", *Studies in the History of Political Philosophy*, Vol. II.

conception of nationalism as a religion meant the totality of the activities of the people in attaining an independent, happy and restrained life for themselves.

7. SANATANA DHARMA AND NATIONALISM

(a) *Sanatana Dharma as Nationalism*

After his return from a year's solitary cell-life in Alipore, Aurobindo modified his older conception of nationalism as a religion. He began now to emphasize that Sanatana Dharma itself was nationalism. He said that the cosmic spirit was moving towards the realization of an all-embracing world-religion which would have its basis in the 'wider Hinduism'.[1] The Sanatana Dharma was no dogmatic orthodox church. Although it had some profound religious scriptures like the Veda, the Vedanta, the Gita, the Yoga and the Tantra, still its most authoritative infallible scripture lay in the secret depths of a man's inward being. The Sanatana Dharma signified the eternal truths and principles of human life and the cosmos, and of this body of knowledge India "has always been destined to be the guardian, exemplar and missionary".[2] The rise of India meant the expansion and the extended greatness of Sanatana Dharma. But the geographical confines of India did not exhaust the bounds of Sanatana Dharma. Although it grew and was conserved in the Indian peninsula it was meant for the good of the world. ". . .in this sacred and ancient land it was given as a charge to the Aryan race to preserve through the ages"[3] and in this sense, because the Sanatana Dharma is eternal, the Hindu Nation also is eternal. "I say no longer that nationalism is a creed, a religion, a faith; I say that it is the Sanatana Dharma which for us is nationalism. This Hindu Nation was born with the Sanatana Dharma, with it it moves and with it it grows. When the Sanatana Dharma declines then the nation declines and if the Sanatana Dharma were capable of perishing, with the Sanatana Dharma it would perish. The Sanatana Dharma, that is nationalism."[4]

[1] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 5.
[2] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 2.
[3] Sri Aurobindo, *The Uttarapara Speech*, p. 18.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

This new conception of Sanatana Dharma as nationalism modifies the political character of the earlier conception of nationalism as a pure and *Sattvic* religion. The latter conception can infuse political and social action with a crusading zeal and enthusiasm. The former moderates the political orientation and asserts a vital type of religious revivalism. This change in political theory was a reflection of the change in Aurobindo's personality. Before he went to prison, Aurobindo revealed a greater political keenness and realism. After his return, politics became subservient to spiritualism. This change is apparent if the contents of the politically-oriented *Bande Mataram* are compared with the spiritually-oriented *Karmayogin* and the *Dharma*.

The new conception of Sanatana Dharma as nationalism had two sociological aspects. First, it was a powerful message of religious revival. Secondly, it was strongly suffused with elements of messianism. As a revivalist, Aurobindo looked to the ancient heroic periods of India's splendour and not to the revival of the decadent and moribund India of the eighteenth century, which by its weakness gave the chance of success to foreigners. He wanted the revival of "the spirit, ideals and methods of the ancient India in a yet more effective form and with a more modern organisation".[1] This desire to revive the ancient past and to dynamize that "with a more modern organization" differentiates the revivalism of Aurobindo from that of Dayananda. According to Dayananda the Vedas represented not only the ancient fount of physical and metaphysical wisdom but contained the final and complete gospel of national and world regeneration. In the scheme of Dayananda India had nothing to learn from the West but a lot to contribute. He desired that the India which existed five thousand years ago, before the battle described in the Mahabharata, should be revived. But Aurobindo who had lived for fourteen years in Europe, during the most impressionable period of his life, and who had drunk deeply from the springs of Western classicism and had seen the growth of industrial science and mechanical technology, could not be a literal revivalist like the Vedist Dayananda.

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *The Brain of India*, pp. 10-11.

Aurobindo was not a blind worshipper of the past.[1] He discerns three elements in all life.[2] First, a fixed and permanent spirit which cannot be changed but may sometimes be lost or obscured. Secondly, a developing yet constant soul which should not be rashly meddled with. Thirdly, the brittle mutable body which was to be used as an instrument. There should be no irrational love for social and political and vital experimentations for their own sake, but on the other hand there should be no antipathetic aversion to change. "We will keep none which the national spirit desires to replace by one that is a still better and truer expression of the undying soul of the nation."[3] In the early phases of the Indian political movement, the inclination to imitate the West was strong. In the later phases the soul of the nation had emerged due to the reassertion of the ancient wisdom of the country by stalwarts and outspoken champions of that wisdom. Some of the greatest Indian reformers and leaders like Dayananda, Vivekananda, Tilak and Aurobindo were deeply and profoundly versed in the ancient literature of India and they enunciated the vitality of the old gospel. Aurobindo was against any imitation. He wanted India to be faithful to her real self, and she could be true to herself only if she discovered her genuine soul which was manifested in the ancient scriptures. He therefore insisted on the recovery of the Veda, the Vedanta, the Yoga and the Tantra. He said: "It is God's will that we should be ourselves and not Europe."[4] But he did not stand for an utter condemnation of the European civilization. He was only opposed to the dominating secularistic and imperialistic stamp of the Occident. He wanted to pursue the study of European civilization from the Indian standpoint. He was not opposed to borrowing some things, if essential, from the West, but "what we have to take from the West we shall take as Indians".[5] But the central inspiration to the national movement was to be provided by the concepts of ancient Indian ethical and spiritual thought. Aurobindo wanted that the supreme gospels of ancient India—*Tapasya*,

[1] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 27.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *The Ideal of the Karmayagin*, p. 27.
[4] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, pp. 6-7.
[5] *Ibid.*

Jnana and *Sakti*, should become the central ideational theme in the new political movement.

Europe might have succeeded even with the divorce between intellect and spirit, or the alienation between strength and purity, but India could not conquer by a European strength.[1] She had to be her real spiritual self and for that the ancient Vedanta and the Tantra should become the dynamic spiritual propulsive forces. In thundering words Aurobindo declared: "Indians, it is the spirituality of India, the *Sadhana* of India, *Tapasya*, *Jnanam*, *Sakti* that must make us free and great. And these great things of the East are ill-rendered by their inferior English equivalents, discipline, philosophy, strength. *Tapasya* is more than discipline, it is the materialization in ourselves, by spiritual means, of the divine energy, creative, preservative and destructive. *Jnanam* is more than philosophy, it is the inspired and direct knowledge which comes of what our ancients called *Dristi*, spiritual sight. *Sakti* is more than strength, it is the universal energy which moves the stars, made individual. It is the East that must conquer in India's uprising. It is the Yogin who must stand behind the political leader or manifest within him; Ramdas must be born in one body with Shivaji, Mazzini mingle with Cavour."[2]

By insisting on stopping the imitation of European methods and emphasizing the need for recovering the ancient spirit of India, Aurobindo wanted the people of India to attain national maturity, moral strength and confidence. He did not stand for any social conservatism and reaction. He was opposed not to change but to the irrational imitation of the West. Indian society might have to undergo a thorough reconstruction, amounting even to a revolution, but it would not be a Europeanization.[3] It would be an extended and more spiritual expression of the same national impulse and spirit which had manifested itself in the past through the bond of blood in the joint-family, through the bond of partial communism in the village system and through the bond of birth and the corporate sense of honour in the caste.[4]

[1] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 18.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 26. [4] *Ibid.*

(*b*) *Sociological Foundations of the Revivalistic Elements in Indian Political Thought*

It has been true in the case of Indian leaders and intellectuals that although they have assimilated the political and scientific wisdom of Europe with great ease, they have still been rooted in the old traditions and have had a strong belief in the spiritual foundations of political authority. I think that there has been a reason, and a very plausible one, for it. The five great forces and movements that have convulsed Europe and transformed her form the medieval scholastic Christian commonwealth into a strong political body of nation-states mostly believing in the economic and military roots of power are the Renaissance, the Reformation, science and the Industrial Revolution, the French Revolution and Socialism. These movements took place in Europe during the course of nearly five centuries. European intellectuals and peoples therefore got the requisite time for changing and adjusting their value-patterns according to the shifting demands of scientific ideas and socio-political changes. But in India during the course of only one century and a quarter there have been movements of renaissance, religious reformation, political independence, science and technology, democracy and socialism. Hence the secularization of the basis of life has not proceeded very far. The belief in the sanctity of spiritual values has been very strong in Ramakrishna, Dayananda, Aurobindo and Gandhi. Unlike the Western prophets and propagandists of nationalism, Aurobindo is emphatic in his assertion that political success cannot be achieved without the incorporation of spiritual and moral values in life. The spiritual concepts of *Tapasya*, *Jnana* and *Sakti* are essential not only for the salvation of the soul but are also vital elements for the achievement of success in political struggles. Aurobindo is a perfect believer in the spiritualist theory of politics. He is fully convinced that unless fundamental spiritual norms are incorporated into the political and social life of the country, India cannot rise to great heights. He wants India to be not just a mere pale replica of Europe. She should attempt to excel the achievements she had to her credit in the past. This is possible only through spiritual techniques. There has been a strong

traditionalist basis for such ideas in the dominant trends of Indian culture which is deeply rooted in the values and ideas of the ancient scriptures. Aurobindo states that only when India had found the secret of expressing herself in spiritual activities could she erect the foundation of a strong social and industrial life.

A national movement to be successful and powerful had to insist on people being their own selves. The spirit of India awoke first in the field of religion and there was evinced a pronounced desire among several individuals and groups to engage in all types of spiritual and intellectual activities. The partition of Bengal generated a strong political force of *Rajas* by evoking feelings of anger, vindictiveness and antipathy against the established regime. Thus "the spirit which had already declared itself in our religious life entered in by this broad doorway into politics",[1] and once the national spirit had declared its independence in the fields of religion and politics the other fields of creative activity were bound to assume a national orientation. This revivalistic emphasis on the nation's being true to its real self is very strong in Aurobindo's political philosophy. Referring to Ireland he had written:

> "For 'tis not foreign force, nor weight of wars,
> Nor treason, nor surprise, nor opposite stars,
> Not all these have enslaved nor can, whate'er
> Vulgar opinion bruit, nor years impair,
> Ruin discourage, nor disease abate
> A nation. Men are fathers of their fate;
> They dig the prison, they the crown command.
> Yet thine own self a little understand,
> Unhappy country and be wise at length."[2]

Revivalism as a political factor has often appeared in India. The rise of the Sungas, the Kanvas, the Andhras, the Vakatakas, the Bharasivas and the Guptas marked the partial revival of the orthodox Brahmanical religion against the ascendency of

[1] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, pp. 23-4.
[2] Sri Aurobindo, "Lines on Ireland" (1896), *Collected Poems and Plays*, vol. I, p. 13.

Buddhism.[1] In modern times the revivalistic element has been strong in Ramakrishna, Dayananda, Vivekananda, Ramtirtha, Tilak, Aurobindo and Gandhi. Revivalism can operate both in the social and religious fields. In India, due to the all-comprehensive nature of Dharma, religious revival has meant also revival in other fields. Political revival of the old autonomous village polity has also often been conceived as a practical programme by Indian leaders[2] and even in modern India concrete steps have been taken to revive and to bolster further the village system. The revival of the old religious tradition as a bulwark against the encroachments of an alien Western system of civilization has been very pronounced in Dayananda, Vivekananda, Ramatirtha, Tilak, Aurobindo and Gandhi. Assessing the role and orientation of Tilak as a political leader Aurobindo speaks of "... the peculiar role which he has played as a trusted and accredited leader of conservative and religious India in the path of democratic politics. It was his position which enabled him to effect the union of the new political spirit with the tradition and sentiment of the historic past and of both with the ineradicable religious temperament of the people of which these festivals [the Shivaji and the Ganapati festivals] were the symbol".[3] Tilak, Gandhi and Aurobindo wrote commentaries on the Gita and wanted to utilize the gospel of that great scripture as the moral and spiritual foundation for effective action in the world.

The religious orientation and the revivalist character of the Indian nationalist movement has been quite significant. There is nothing comparable to it in the teachings of Mazzini or the Irish Sinn Fein movement. The Russian Slavophils and the Islamic Wahabi movement in Egypt afford some parallels. Some form of revivalism is to be found in all big movements. The Renaissance looked to ancient Hellas and Rome and the French Revolution drew inspiration from the Roman republic. Machiavelli looked to the revival of Roman republican virtues in place of the enervating doctrines of Christianity and Spengler prognosticated the return of the spirit of Alaric and Theodoric

[1] V.P. Varma, *Studies in Hindu Political Thought and Its Metaphysical Foundations* (Banaras, 1954), pp. 30-1.

[2] P.C. Ray, *Life and Times of C.R. Das*, p. 275.

[3] *Bankima-Tilak-Dayananda*, p. 18.

into the Germanic world. Aurobindo stood for the revival of the spirit of the Vedanta, the Yoga and the Tantra. To the extent that he also included the Tantra his revivalism referred to Hinduism in its more comprehensive character unlike the revivalism of Vivekananda and Ramatirtha which laid the central emphasis only on the Vedanta, or the revivalism of Dayananda which was confined only to the four Vedic Samhitas.

There were various sociological and historical factors responsible for the dominant religious and revivalistic orientation of Indian nationalism. First, the continuing power of Brahmanical ecclesiasticism, as the repository of the sacred wisdom of old, over the mind of India was a great factor. The decline of Buddhism which contained more rational and critical elements in it had left the field clear for the sway of the old religious and philosophic thought. The challenges offered to Christian ecclesiasticism by the rise of modern science did not have their parallels in India and so the halo round the scriptures of ancient India was never shattered. The belief continued unabated that they must contain words of profound intellectual and spiritual worth. The obscurity of the Vedic and classical Sanskrit language served to give those books a great awe-striking character. Several modern thinkers and scholars have paid tributes to the glories of the ancient scriptures. The researches of Dayananda and Max Muller and the eloquent testifications to the greatness of the monistic philosophy of the Vedanta by Schopenhauer, Emerson, Thoreau, Deussen, Ram Mohan Roy and Vivekananda had very powerful effects in generating nationalistic sentiments of pride in India's past achievements. Therefore the Indian mind has been generally receptive to revivalistic gospels.

Secondly, while in Europe the rise of nationalism on a large scale was marked by the preceding growth of a powerful rationalistic philosophy, the nationalistic movement in India arose in the wake of a religious and ethical revivalism. Diderot and Voltaire championed the cause of enlightenment and we find that leaders of the French Revolution, like Robespierre, worshipped reason. The advocacy of rationalism by Descartes, Spinoza and Leibnitz and the growth of physics had further secularized the European intellectual outlook. The emphasis

on a political nationalism that we find in Cavour or Garibaldi or Kossuth or Bismarck we do not find in India. The Indian Moderates like Dadabhai Naoroji, Surendranath Banerjea, Ferozshah Mehta and Gokhale were of course trying to incorporate the tone of Burke and Mill and Spencer into Indian politics, but they never obtained the profound hold on the mind and heart of the Indian people which the stalwarts of revivalism like Dayananda, Tilak and Gandhi had.

Thirdly, the presence of a militant, powerful Moslem minority in India always made the religious question very acute. The British imperialistic policy of 'divide and rule' intensified the separatist consciousness which by antipathetic reaction accentuated revivalism. The Moslem minority was very sensitive for fear of being suppressed, due to the probable chances of political victory of the Hindu majority. The rise of political pan-Islamism led to the accentuated growth of Moslem religious consciousness throughout the Islamic world from Turkey and Egypt to India. Although the Hindu-Moslem controversy did not play any significant part in the Bengal nationalist movement of 1905-10, Aurobindo in his later writings considered the differences between the two communities to be a factor hindering the growth of nationalism in India. Thus, the powerfully entrenched Brahmin orthodoxy, the revivalistic nature of the Indian renaissance, the relative absence of a scientific rationalism and philosophical enlightenment movement and the presence of a very powerful religious Moslem minority—all these factors combined to impart a strong revivalistic note to the Indian nationalist movement.

8. SANATANA DHARMA AS WORLD-RELIGION: SOCIOLOGY OF MESSIANISM

The second aspect of the Aurobindian conception of Sanatana Dharma as nationalism was messianism. According to Aurobindo, Sanatana Dharma did not signify any narrow creed. Although the Vedas, the Vedanta, the Gita, the Yoga, the Tantra and the Puranas were the basic scriptures of Hinduism, the Sanatana Dharma which is the basis of the future world-religion, towards which the world-spirit was moving, could not

reject even the Bible or the Koran. The real scripture, however, that was fully authentic was the human heart wherein the divine himself dwelt.[1] Earlier than the conception of the world religion —"which embraces science, faith, theism, Christianity, Mahomedanism and Buddhism and yet is none of these"[2]— advocated by Aurobindo, Vivekananda had formulated the idea of a universal religion which was not an intellectual eclecticism but attempted the discovery of one fundamental spiritual truth in all religions. Aurobindo stressed that in order to be the basis and spiritual foundation of the future world-religion Hinduism had to be dynamic. "Hinduism has always been pliable and aggressive, it has thrown itself on the attacking force, carried its positions, plundered its treasures, made its own everything of value it had and ended in wholly annexing it or driving it out by rendering its future continuance in the country purposeless and therefore impossible."[3] In the intellectual vigour and success of Vivekananda Aurobindo discovered the signs of the new, dynamic, aggressive and spiritually powerful Hinduism. He envisaged the possibility of a new synthesis of the Vedanta, Samkara's being only one synthesis revealing the austere monism of its gospel but by no means exhausting all the possible syntheses that could be evolved out of the Vedanta. Aurobindo even began to assert that the real aim of the nationalist movement was not the mere achievement of political autonomy and independence but the expansion of Indian civilization.[4] He referred to the crossing of the geographical limits of Asia by the gospel of the Vedanta and the Yoga, which had even gone to Europe and America. "The world waits for the rising of India to receive the divine flood in its fulness."[5] Only the luminous and profound wisdom of India emerging from a direct realization of the spirit could save the world. "Because God is there, and it is his mission, and he has something for us to do. He has a work for his great and ancient nation. Therefore he has been born again to do it, therefore he is revealing himself in you not that you may be like other nations, not that you may rise merely by human strength to

[1] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, pp. 5-6. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 5. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 22
[4] Sri Aurobindo, *Dharma Aur Jatiyata* (in Hindi), p. 110.
[5] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 11.

trample underfoot the weaker peoples, but because something must come out from you which is to save the whole world."[1] The work to be done was of a moral and spiritual character, and did not aim at the mere structural and organizational change of a system of government. A "spiritual revolution"[2] was the fundamental aim and of that aim, politics, howsoever significant, was only a part. The material changes and actions were to be only shadows and reflections of the great spiritual transformation. In order that India could do her best to harness all her energies and efforts for this great task which was imperative in the interests of the world, it was necessary that she should be free and united.[3] Therefore, India's freedom necessary for the regeneration and redemption of the world, had to be won; this was to be the fundamental faith with which the Karmayogi was to work. Karma Yoga means the application of the teachings of the Vedanta and the Yoga to life. India could if she wanted "give a new and decisive turn to the problems over which all mankind is labouring and stumbling, for the clue to their solutions is there in her ancient knowledge."[4] India and Hinduism had not only to exist and somehow survive in the world "but to conquer".[5] Evidently Aurobindo did not visualize a political or military conquest but a spiritual conquest, something like the one attempted by Buddhism.

The spiritual conquest of the world, leading to a profound spiritual transformation and moral revolution, would necessitate that the Indian nation must be made aware and conscious of this stupendous task. They must know that they were rising for the world and God was "giving them freedom for the service of the world".[6] The pristine and sacred words of spiritual gnosis recording the results of profound meditation and great contemplation, which had been preserved for centuries in the ancient

[1] *Speeches*, pp. 34-5.

[2] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, pp. 2-3.

[3] In a message broadcast on August 14, 1947, Sri Aurobindo reaffirmed the spiritual role of India in the evolution of the higher and larger consciousness of man. ". . . if this evolution is to take place, since it must proceed through a growth of the spirit and the inner consciousness, the initiative can come from India and, although the scope must be universal, the central movement may be hers." *Messages of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*, p. 9.

[4] Sri Aurobindo, *The Renaissance in India*, p. 90.

[5] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 22.

[6] Sri Aurobindo, *The Uttarapara Speech*, p. 7.

land of India, had once more to be re-studied and made dynamic forces. India was "rising to shed the eternal light entrusted to her over the world. India had always existed for humanity and not for herself and it is for humanity and not for herself that she must be great".[1] To be successful in this divine mission, India should make Yoga the ideal of her life. The tremendous energy that was needed to effectuate a profound transformation could be attained only by the power of Yoga.[2] Yoga, to Aurobindo, meant not external austerities and physical askesis but an inward transfiguration and divinization of man's central being. The real problem lay inwards and not in external nature and society. The true solution, therefore, lay not in progressive control over the external world through manipulating the resources of science and technology, but in making a conquest of one's self. In Bipin Pal, Aurobindo and Gandhi we find made the distinction between a mere political independence and an inward conquest of one's self for purposes of spiritual enlightenment. Asia and India were rising, believed Aurobindo, not for the sake of comfort and luxury but for "vindicating the freedom of man within as well as without"[3] and for "conquering from within external nature".[4] It was for completing this profound moral and spiritual work that India claimed her "destined freedom and greatness"[5] and it was "to the interest of all humanity, not excluding England, that she should wholly establish her claim".[6] Only the rays of spiritual light emanating from Asia could give to the peoples of Europe visions of the eternal spirit and so the resurgence of Asia and the freedom of India were essential.[7] The destiny of India did not lie in being an outlying province of the British empire or a dependent adjunct of European civilization. "We believe . . . that India is destined to work out her own independent life and civilization, to stand in the forefront of the world and solve the political, social, economic and moral problems which Europe has failed to solve, yet the pursuit of which and the feverish passage in that pursuit from experiment to experiment, from failure to failure, she calls her progress."[8]

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *The Uttarapara Speech*, p. 7.
[2] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 3.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 6. [4] *Ibid.* [5] *Ibid.* [6] *Ibid.*
[7] *Aravinda Mandira Me* (in Hindi), p. 78. [8] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 4.

Aurobindo throughout his life retained his passionate faith and profound conviction in the messianic greatness of India. He felt that the world was getting ready for a new spiritual dispensation and India was to be the heralder of a new gospel and *Weltanschauung*. Throughout the centuries, through all the variances of her political and social progress and frustration, India had retained her faith in the supremacy of the spirit. It was in the cosmic plan that at a chaotic and critical moment in the destiny of the human race she should once again assume her old spiritual leadership. Aurobindo was therefore opposed to the mere imitation of the techniques and ideas of the Western nations. He refused to be satisfied with the emphasis being placed only on political independence. He always held a dynamic conception of the spirit which manifests itself through nature and life and mind. An all-comprehensive change in the structure of the world would necessitate a dynamic actualization of the power of the concealed spirit, and India alone could do this work. But in order to do something for the spiritual regeneration of the world India should first be her own political master. Political independence was the necessary instrument for and prelude to the fulfilment of her spiritual destiny. On December 11, 1948, in a message to the Andhra University on the occasion of the presentation of the Sir C.R. Reddi National Prize to him, Aurobindo re-emphasized the spiritual role of India in the world. India was not to be "a nation like many others evolving an opulent industry and commerce, a powerful organization of social and political life, an immense military strength, practising power politics with a high degree of success, guarding and extending jealously her gains and her interests, dominating over a large part of the world, but in this apparently magnificent progression forfeiting its *Svadharma*, losing its soul. Then ancient India and her spirit might disappear altogether and we have only one more nation like the others and that would be a real gain neither to the world nor to us. . . .It would be a tragic irony of fate, if India were to throw away her spiritual heritage at the very moment when in the rest of the world there is more and more a turning towards her for spiritual help and a saving light".[1] Aurobindo emphasizes the same message in

[1] *Messages of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*, pp. 22-3.

a letter written in 1950: "... India is free and her freedom was necessary if the Divine work was to be done. The difficulties that surround her and may increase for a time, especially with regard to the Pakistan imbroglio, were also things that had to come and to be cleared out.... Afterwards, the work for the Divine will become more possible and it may well be that the dream, if it is a dream, of leading the world towards the spiritual light, may even become a reality."[1]

This messianism—the faith in the mission of India to save the world, has been a very pronounced feature in the writings and speeches of Indian leaders since Ram Mohan onwards. Ram Mohan wanted India even to adopt English as the universal language and then to achieve independence and enlighten the rest of Asia. He showed great enthusiasm for the success of the cause of liberty in Ireland, for Naples crushed under reaction, and for France in the Revolutions of 1830.[2] Dayananda was the great prophet of Vedism and he put a new and powerful dynamic spirit into the famous Mantra of the Rigveda: "The world should be made Aryan"—*Krinvanto Visvamaryam.* Vivekananda spoke of "the tidal waves of philosophy that have covered the earth, East or West" and he was convinced that from India would arise the spiritual gospel that would save the world from the depths of materialism.[3] Ramatirtha stressed the greatness of the monistic philosophy of the Vedanta and its imperative necessity for the peoples of the world. Bipin Pal referred to the purpose of God in India—to make her stand for Krishna and for the good of the world. He declared that India's part and function in the history of the world was to lead humanity to a universal federation.[4] Tagore spoke of the universalism of the spiritual message of India to the West. Gandhi thought that India was rising to prove to the world the superior moral efficacy of non-violence.

This type of messianism has been present in different parts of the world and has played a significant role in political and religious history. According to Spengler monotheism, messianism and the concept of the chosen people are basic Magian

[1] Sri Aurobindo, "Letter on the Present Situation", *Advent*, 1950, pp. 90-1.
[2] Romain Rolland, *The Life of Ramakrishna*, pp. 112-3.
[3] Swami Vivekananda's first public lecture in the East (1897).
[4] Bipin Chandra Pal, *Nationality and Empire*, pp. 114-5.

ideas.[1] There are clear traces in *Isaiah* and even later, of the faith in the coming of a messiah who will redeem the sufferings of the people. Messianism arose in the Jewish consciousness as part of an inner moral dialectic to explain terrestrial history. It became the basic idea of "Magian religion, for it contains implicitly the conception of the world-historical struggle between Good and Evil, with the power of Evil prevailing in the middle period and the Good finally triumphant on the Day of Judgement".[2] The Zoroastrians held the doctrine of Saoshyant (the coming helper). Zoroaster believed that the reign of Ormuzd (the kingdom of God) would come during his lifetime. Judaism became the great heralder of the concept of the messiah and it was from Judaism that Christianity and Islam borrowed this idea. The faith that a redeemer would solve all the problems of the Jews arose and developed. The concept of the messiah was later on socialized and the functions that were once attributed to a personal redeemer came to be applied to a class or a nation. The Jews conceived themselves to be the chosen people who would shed light on the world. Sometimes the emphasis was put on national messianism and on the central importance of bettering the social and political situation. At other times the emphasis was on universal messianism and the idea of the salvation of mankind was stressed.[3] It was believed that the chosen people could bring about this universal salvation. In the first letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul distinguishes the Messianic kingdom from the kingdom of Eternity.[4] The first is to last for one thousand years. The second will be the rule not of the messiah but of God.

This Jewish-Christian eschatological conception of the messiah manifested some pronounced political characteristics in the nineteenth century. The rise of nationalism and the growth of a new social and political faith and fervour got mixed up with the older conception of the messiah. We find examples of this political messianism in Zionism, in Russia and in Poland.[5] Zionism fused the national-political messianism of

[1] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, vol. II, pp. 206-7.
[2] *Ibid.* [3] *Isaiah*, II, 2, 3.
[4] St. Paul's *First Letter to the Corinthians*, XV, 23-8, referred to in Albert Schweitzer *Indian Thought and its Development* (New York, Henry Holt & Co., 1936), p. 162.
[5] Hans Kohn, "Messianism", *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*.

the Jews with the rising creed of European nationalism after the French Revolution. Dostoevsky and other writers in Russia transferred the messianic ideas of Judaism to Mother Russia who was regarded as suffering for the sake of other nations. Earlier than Dostoevsky the cult of the third Rome had been preached. The first Rome had failed because it was pagan. The second Rome, Byzantium, could not solve the problems of the world because it was captured by the infidel Turks. Now the mantle had fallen on Moscow, the third Rome. The poets, philosophers and leaders of nineteenth century Poland saw in the Poles the people chosen by God for bringing about on earth the messianic age, in the same way as earlier when they had been chosen to fight the battles of Christianity against the Asiatic Turkish hordes. Thus we find that in the political messianism of the nineteenth century the idea of a whole nation as messiah developed instead of the older idea of a personal messiah or redeemer.[1] The sufferings of the particular nation were interpreted in a vicarious way. Commenting upon the messianic elements in nineteenth century nationalism Hans Kohn says: "The nation transcends the limits of a social or political concept; it becomes a holy body sanctified by God, and nationalism is no longer a political loyalty which can be changed according to social circumstances and convictions but becomes a religious duty full of responsibility towards God and the redemption."[2] That the nation which had been oppressed and humiliated will be the teacher of mankind was the dominant faith in the semi-national political-religious universalism of the nineteenth century[3] and even of the twentieth. Hans Kohn finds echoes of such political messianism in Russia, Poland, Germany and India.

Nationalistic or religious messianism is born out of and rationalizes social and political frustrations and deprivations. Its intensity increases in direct proportion to the intensity of the grief and sorrow of the party or the group that is subjected to humiliation. It is a product both of frustration and of faith. When the chances of success are completely absent there is utter

[1] Cf. Salo Baron, *Religion and Nationalism*.
[2] Hans Kohn, "Messianism", *E.S.S.*
[3] According to Mazzini, Italy was the chosen country for a third revelation. See Sri Aurobindo, *Conversations of the Dead*, p. 14.

hopelessness and despair, and a spirit of calm resignation and silent surrender prevails. But when there are even remote chances of future success, the tendency arises to interpret present suffering as only a means for some future purpose. There is an extension of altruistic feelings and the group tends to assume an attitude of righteousness in suffering for the sake of others. Hence the sentiments of ego-transcendence and increasing sociability and psychological identification with a large unit also are satisfied. Messianism aided the Jews in rationalizing their sufferings and gave to them a deep and certain faith in their eventual victory in spite of the protracted periods of sufferings and persecutions extending over centuries, through which they had to pass. In Russia messianism has not been as pronounced as in Judaism but there also the tremendous agnoies of the people intensified the belief in their vicarious sufferings for the sake of humanity.

The situation in India has been different from that of Judaism. Indian nationalistic messianism has been a rationalization of the periods of persecution, suffering and wounded pride. Hindu culture had been exposed to tremendous onslaughts from foreigners. All other foreign elements had been assimilated and absorbed by Hinduism except the Moslems. The coming of the Europeans challenged the sensitiveness and destroyed the pride of the Hindus in their superior moral and spiritual attainments. The fact of political and economic prostration was too blatant and powerful a demolisher of all true and assumed ideas of India being the 'land of the gods'. The Indian people were facing a dangerous threat to their sense of self-esteem and their "residues"[1] of personal, social and national integrity. Messianism developed as a necessary counterpoise to political and economic subjection. Messianism implied that it did not matter if Europe was materially more powerful, because India was superior in the realm of intellect and definitely in the realm of spirit. Though the chances of victory in a *physical* tussle with the British were slender, the belief grew that India was bound to succeed in attaining freedom because she had to give to the world the divine light, and she could not do

[1] "Residues" in the sense implied in Pareto's use of the term. Residues are basic urges or dominant drives.

that unless she was politically free. The political emancipation of India was conceived to be in the divine plan. India had to rise to deliver the divine message to a sorrow-stricken humanity suffering from the evils of secularism, atheism, nihilism and materialism. Dayananda formulated his scheme of universal history wherein he attempted to show that whatever civilization and culture there was in the world had spread from Aryavarta (as he termed India) and the world could be saved only by the spread and practice of the Aryan Vedic gospel. Vivekananda repeatedly emphasized the idea of the spiritual and even intellectual superiority of the Hindus to the Westerners. Aurobindo, although he accepts the synthesis of the ascetic emphasis on the quest of the spirit and the materialistic emphasis on life, has always stressed the moral and spiritual greatness of India and has propounded the view that the ultimate regeneration of the world would come only through the spiritual light shed by Indian sages.

Conceptually, perhaps, the Indian messianism of the modern period did not derive from, nor was influenced by, the Judaic and Christian messianism. It was influenced vitally by the ideas and practices of the Buddhist teachers. Buddha is reported to have wished that his teachings should spread in all directions, and the evangelical enterprises of the Buddhistic monks had been indeed remarkably daring and adventurous. Dayananda and Vivekananda also ardently desired to spread the ancient Indian gospel in the world. But there was one very vital difference between Buddhism and Daynanda on the one hand and Aurobindo and the political messianists on the other. Buddha and Dayananda preached the supremacy and the efficacy of their religious teachings. There was no idea in them of a group or a country being specially commissioned by some higher power to spread that gospel in the world. But in Aurobindo and the political messianists the emphasis was not on the static point of view that the spiritual ideas of India should spread in the world but that India was rising as a nation to preach to the world the greatness of her spiritual ideas. Aurobindo says: "One of the oldest races and greatest civilisations on this earth, the most indomitable in vitality, the most fecund in greatness, the deepest in life, the most wonderful in potentiality . . . is

sure to succeed because the freedom, unity and greatness of India have now become necessary to the world."[1]

This nationalistic messianism of Aurobindo seems to run counter to his transcendentalistic and universalistic Vedantism. It reminds us more of Hegel than of Samkara. Like Hegel, Aurobindo attributes a dynamic nature to the absolute, accepts the concept of the *Welt-Geist* in history and also, like him, preaches the creed of the spirit of the nation. It is true that Aurobindo is not a narrow nationalist and goes beyond Hegel in accepting the idea of humanity and cosmopolitanism, and even formulates his plans of human unity. But still there is some contradiction in his simultaneous acceptance of the theory of spiritual determinism in history which implies the immanence of the divine in the historical phases and moments of all nations, and of the creed of the messianistic vocation of one particular nation which bases itself on the conception of the uniqueness of a specific people. It would appear as if he has been using the universalistic Vedantic ideas to serve the purpose of the Indian nation.

This creed of nationalistic messianism reveals one fundamental note of the spiritualist theory of politics. A spiritual and metaphysical orientation to politics is born out of pessimism regarding existing conditions and relies on a profound future optimism. Plato was perturbed at the tragedy of the Peloponnesian War. St. Augustine was shocked at the capture of Rome by Alaric in A.D. 410. Fichte and Hegel wrote against the background of Germany's humiliations at Jena. Gandhi and Aurobindo wrote when they were grief-stricken at the downtrodden condition of India. Hence the present offered no relief. The only recourse, therefore, was to accept the prospect of an ideal future.Plato believed that the rule of the philosopher-king, if providentially arranged, could solve the problems of society and politics. St. Augustine believed in the idea of the transmutation of the terrestrial city into the divine city because the state could not guarantee justice. Fichte also, towards the end of his life, visualized, like Plato, the rule of philosophers. Gandhi had his visions of *Ramrajya* and Aurobindo outlines schemes of a gnostic community. Only Hegel among the great idealists stands for supporting things as they are. In Aurobindo's

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 1.

spiritualist theory of politics there is a profound futurism and optimism.

9. POLITICS AND VEDANTA: THEORY OF "POLITICAL VEDANTISM"

Besides being a prophet of nationalism as a religion and of the conception of Sanatana Dharma as nationalism, during 1905-'07 Aurobindo was a preacher of "Political Vedantism" and passive resistance. In one of his letters dated 13 August 1905, he wrote: "I have adopted the principles of the political philosophy of the West and I have assimilated that to the immortal teachings of Vedantism."[1] The concept of Political Vedantism is highly significant and it symbolizes one of the most profound transformations of ancient Hindu thought in modern India. Aurobindo has tried to interpret some of the spiritual concepts of Vedantic philosophy in a political context. He is not a lone representative of this tendency but is a very significant figure in what I would like to call the general movement of the "secularization of the Vedanta". By secularization I mean the use and interpretation of spiritual notions for material purposes, and not the negation of spiritual and absolutist ideas.[2] Vivekananda and Ramatirtha formulated the conception of practical Vedanta as the way to success in individual and national life. Aurobindo expounds the philosophy of Political Vedantism. Tilak supported political violence on the basis of the metaphysics of the Gita. Gandhi emphasized the service to humanity as a *Yajna* leading to emancipation and God-realization. Advaitism, or the conception of a monistic spiritual absolute, has been considered in modern Indian thought as the foundation of a spiritual and transcendental ethics superior to the ethics of Bentham, Mill, Spencer and even Kant and Green. Vivekananda and Aurobindo have defended the Vedanta from the charge of being neutral to ethics and have, like Paul Deussen, regarded the Vedanta to be the basis of the highest morality. Tagore referred to the dynamic aspects of the teachings of the

[1] Extracts from this letter in C.R. Das's speech, Appendix B, J.C. Ghose, *Life-Work of Sri Aurobindo Ghose*, p. 185.

[2] In *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* Max Weber discusses the concept of secularization in post-sixteenth century European thought.

Upanishads and Buddhism in his formula of "the humanity of our God, or the divinity of Man the Eternal".[1] Vedantic spiritualism has been invoked in modern India to preach racial equality and the abolition of untouchability. Thus we find that the Vedanta, which not only in the stern monism of Samkara but also in its other interpreters as Ramanuja, Vallabha, Nimbarka and Madhva, had been considered a gospel of world-renunciation and detachment leading to cosmic and transcendental realization, has been used to substantiate a gospel of fulfilment of life. The belief has been gradually gaining ground that perhaps the ascetic interpretation of the Vedanta is a medieval phenomenon and that the ancient Upanishads teach a more happy, synthetic and world-fulfilling outlook.

Vivekananda took the lead in giving to the old ideas of the Vedanta a new dynamic interpretation for social and political purposes, and his great influence on Bengal nationalism has been testified to by Lala Lajpat Rai and Subhas Bose.[2] Vivekananda preached the greatness of the Vedanta as the only system of religion and philosophy which could not only stand the onslaughts of science but could give a larger meaning even to science. He felt that the electro-magnetic theory was advancing science in the direction of Vedanta.[3] He pointed out that under Buddha and Samkara Advaitism had rendered a national service by saving India from materialism.[4] He discovered the superiority of the Vedanta in that it preaches the divinity of man, and not his sinfulness as Christianity does. The political and social implication that he drew from the Vedanta was remarkable in its insistence on strength as the remedy for all evils and misery in the world.[5] According to him the poor, the ignorant and the sinners needed strength, and nothing gave as much strength as the idea of monism. B. N. Seal interpreted the creed of Vivekananda as "the creed of the universal man, and the absolute and inalienable sovereignty of the self".[6]

[1] Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, p. 17.

[2] Lala Lajpat Rai, *Taruna Bharat* (in Hindi), pp. 137-9. Subhas Chandra Bose, *The Indian Struggle*, p. 35, regards Vivekananda as the spiritual father of the modern nationalist movement at least in Bengal.

[3] Swami Vivekananda, *Jnana Yoga*, *passim*.

[4] *The Complete Works of Vivekananda*, II, pp. 138-9.

[5] *Ibid.*, and pp. 201 and 198.

[6] Article of Dr. B.N. Seal on Vivekananda in *The Prabuddha Bharat*, 1907.

Swami Ramatirtha interpreted the gospel of Vedanta as the secret of success. He made the astounding statement that Japan and America had succeeded in the struggle of life and become strong nations because they practised the essential teachings of Vedanta, although they did not make verbal professions of the Vedantic faith. Vedanta was the road to success in the world because it taught selflessness, incessant work and fearlessness. He exonerated Vedantism from the charge of being responsible for the fall of India. During ancient times the Vedantic spirit prevailed in India and hence the Egyptians, the Assyrians and the Romans dared not penetrate into the country. India had fallen, according to Ramatirtha, because she had given up the Vedanta. Ramatirtha thought that Newton and Kant succeeded because they practised the Vedantic teaching of purity while Napolean fell because he went against the spirit of the Vedanta.[1]

Aurobindo interprets the Vedanta as containing an exalted conception of life. "The dignity of human existence, given to it by the thought of the Vedantic and the classical ages of Indian culture, exceeded anything conceived by the noblest idea of humanity. Man is a spirit veiled in the works of energy and moving to self-discovery."[2] The aim of man according to the Vedanta is to become perfected and to attain unity with the cosmic and transcendental being. Approximations to this ideal can be found in Pythagoreanism, Platonism and Stoicism but the full resplendence of the idea is contained only in the Vedanta.

But there is, I think, one vital difference between the Vedantic conception of the individual and the Stoic-Christian conception. I would like to distinguish three levels of equality to understand this difference. First, the concept of *transcendental equality of all existence from the standpoint of the spirit.* This idea we find in the Vedanta and in the famous verse of the Bhagavadgita which preaches that to the man of realization the same spirit seems to manifest itself in all existence and hence he looks without passion and with equal vision upon 'the Brahmin, the Pariah,

[1] Swami Ramatirtha, *In Woods of God Realization* (Lucknow, Ramatirtha Publication League), 8 Volumes, *passim.*

[2] Sri Aurobindo, "The Indian Conception of Life", *Silver Jubilee Commemoration Volume of the Indian Philosophical Congress* (1950), pp. 173-9, p. 174.

the elephant and the dog'.[1] Secondly, there is the notion of *the ideal equality of empirical individuals*. This concept is the foundation and *sine qua non* of democracy. Men, conceived of not as pure spiritual essences or emanations of the divine in the cosmic sense but as empirical individuals, should be all treated as equal. This idea, I think, starts from Stoicism and has been the spiritual and idealistic foundation of all constitutional, humanitarian and democratic ideology. By preaching the idea of the fatherhood of God, Christianity strengthened this notion. The notion of the normative equality of empirical individuals has been the ethical basis of Western democracy. The highly stratified Indian society with its firm faith in the notion of *Karma* and *Adhikara* possibly never developed such a concept. I feel that those writers who conceive that Vedanta provides the spiritual and moral foundations of political democracy are exaggerating because the Vedantic gospels of *Sohamasmi* (I am the spirit) and *Ayamatma Brahma* (the self is the spirit) do not refer to the empirical individuals who are the data of political democracy but to the transcendental unity of the human self and the divine self. I think that the Vedanta does not teach the gospel of equality relevant in a political and social context, but advocates the concept of equality only to the extent that it teaches either identity with, or merging into, the absolute, as the transcendental destiny of all human beings regardless of all mundane differences. The third concept — *real equality for empirical individuals*, is neither existent in society nor can be conceived of as even remotely possible as a future eventuation. Science does not visualize any prospect of real equality of mental equipment and material commodities for all members of the human family.

Stoicism and Christianity uphold the idea of the dignity and equality of the empirical selves, i.e. of the "actual"; therefore, since the Reformation and the rise of the political school of Natural Right, in Europe we find a gospel of political and economic individualism which became the foundation of Western liberal democracy. Since Vedanta taught the dignity and equality of the transcendental selves, i.e. of the "possible", political and social individualism never developed in India on

[1] *Bhagavadgita*, V, 18.

a great theoretical scale. When the incipient Indian democratic republic needed a theory of individual rights, it found this in the British and American constitutions and not in the Chhandogya Upanishad, in spite of Radhakrishnan's view that the Vedantic *Sohamasmi* is the foundation of democracy.

According to Aurobindo, the Vedanta is not merely a philosophy of the cosmos and of the transcendent being and awareness but it also contains the seeds of national emancipation because it provides a metaphysical defence of the idea of the country as the Mother and as divine.[1] The motherland, that is India, is only a power of the ultimate reality; it is the goddess, the mother of the world, Kali. The insults, humiliations and frustrations which the people had to suffer for this sacred goddess were necessary. They were the dialectical mechanisms of God to get the people imbued with the idea of the country as the mother.[2] Aurobindo refers to the great Vedantic concept of Maya. The Maya of the alien civilization was triumphant in India and Mukti or liberation signified political freedom—". . . national Mukti. We in India fell under the influence of the foreigners' Maya which completely possessed our souls. It was the Maya of the alien rule, the alien civilization, the powers and capacities of the alien people who happen to rule over us."[3] This conception of emancipation, not from the inscrutable cosmic Maya with its overwhelming hold, as conceived in the older Vedanta, but from the Maya of a foreign civilization, was another illustration of the use of Vedantic concepts and principles in a political and sociological context.

But perhaps the most astounding example of the secularization of the Vedanta is obtained when Aurobindo equates "Political Vedantism" with ethical relativism and neutrality, bordering almost upon Machiavellism. Aurobindo says: "Vedantism accepts no distinction of true or false religions, but considers only what will lead more or less quickly to Moksha, spiritual emancipation and the realization of the Divinity within. *Our attitude is political Vedantism.* India, free, one and indivisible, is the divine realization to which we move,—emanci-

[1] See Bipin Chandra Pal's article on Aurobindo.
[2] Sri Aurobindo, *Dharma Aur Jatiyata* (in Hindi), p. 96.
[3] Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, p. 45.

pation is our aim; to that end each nation must practise the political creed which is best suited to its temperament and circumstances; for that is best for it which leads most surely and completely to national liberty and national self-realization."[1] But the height of ethical relativism is attained in this statement of Aurobindo: "...[We accept] no method or action as politically good or evil except as it truly helps or hinders our progress towards national emancipation."[2] The basic argument of Aurobindo is that metaphysical Vedantism teaches the concept of the spiritual realization of the absolute, and that being the central aim and the only goal it accepts no distinction between true or false religions but only considers what would be the quickest and the most certain technic of Moksha. The implication is drawn therefrom that "Political Vedantism" should concentrate on the main objective of political emancipation and each nation should choose the means best suited to its temperament and the objective situation and environment. Aurobindo's position has to be analyzed at two levels. First, his statement that Vedantism accepts no distinction of true and false religions is not correct. It is not faithful to the spirit of the Vedantic scriptures. It also appears that Aurobindo has made this statement in the course of a speech and perhaps would not support it in his more philosophic moments. It is true that unlike Buddha and Kant, Aurobindo is not an ethical absolutist. He believes that there are three layers in the world, infra-ethical, ethical and supra-ethical. The basic impulsion in the course of evolutionary progression is not an ethical idea but the urge of the spirit towards self-expression and self-unfolding out of the deep and dense abyss of the inconscient. Only at the present evolutionary level, and that too with regard to a limited part of the world, i.e. the human sphere, is the ethical principle significant. The cosmic universe and the spirit are beyond ethics. Ethical impulses and activities begin in the infra-rational stage and originate from the subconscient, and only at the human stage of evolution do they become explicit and significant. Ethics being only a stage in human evolution, something higher than ethics—a "suprarational good"—must assert itself as the

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, pp. 78-9.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 68.

consummating climax. According to the Vedanta also, a man reaching the stage of final realization goes beyond the distinctions of merit and demerit or good and evil. Not ethics but knowledge is the path to God-consciousness. But both Aurobindo and the Vedanta accept that the transcendence of ethics for the person who has attained the highest realization implies not the obliteration of the distinction between good and evil but a consummation and fulfilment of good. An ethical man struggles for conforming to the good but to the man of realization good becomes a part of his life and nature. It is only in this sense that he goes beyond ethics and not in the sense that he can indulge in indiscriminate good and bad. Christian critics like Keith and others have levelled against the Vedanta the charge of ethical neutrality thinking that even immorality can be tolerated.[1] But the Vedanta does not teach gross hedonism, it inculcates only a spiritual fulfilment of the ethical life. To draw the implication, as Aurobindo does, that Vedanta concentrates only on the goal, and the distinction between good and bad religions is not relevant, is not accurate. Moreover, Aurobindo was addressing not an elite of Brahma-conscious souls but ordinary persons to whom the Vedantic concept of ethical transcendence is not at all applicable. Secondly, in his statement that every nation can choose the means best suited to its temperament and objective situation, Aurobindo is using in a political context the theory of the Gita about *Svadharma* and *Svakarma*. The Gita is emphatic on the adherence to the laws of one's being and repudiates the pursuit of random goals out of fascination for their mere outward attraction. Whatsoever be the vocation a man is engaged in, he can find the absolute through that, provided he pursues that in a spirit of divine-oriented disinterestedness. The principle of *Svadharma* that the Gita has stated with reference to the individual, Aurobindo states with reference to the nation.

Perhaps my statement that Aurobindo's "Political Vedantism" implies at least a mild Machiavellism would sound hard. We are using the word Machiavellism only in the sense of ethical relativism which teaches that there are no absolute and im-

[1] A.B. Keith, *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and the Upanishads*, (Cambridge, Massachussets, 1925), vol. II, pp. 586-7, 594.

mutable criteria of moral action in politics.[1] Without doubt, Aurobindo emphasizes the fundamental importance of the basic aim of "progress towards national emancipation" and upholds that no method or action is politically good or evil except as it helps or hinders the goal. Here, definitely, the means becomes entirely subservient. Only in this sense we say that the Political Vedantism of Aurobindo has Machiavellian implications. Aurobindo is evolving Political Vedantism to support the thesis that at times armed revolt could become necessary against the constituted authority. His Political Vedantism is aimed against the supporters of unadulterated pacifism and non-violence, and since the latter quote the maxim "non-violence is the ultimate religion", Aurobindo resorts to his Political Vedantism. My statement with regard to the Machiavellism of Political Vedantism does not imply in the least that Aurobindo stands for the cult of power and is ready to accept force and fraud as the two supreme techniques in politics. The use of the teachings of the Vedanta and the Gita for the support of political violence has been a fairly common feature of modern Indian political thought, except in the mighty antithesis of the Gandhian Ahimsa; and is found in Tilak, Lajpat Rai and the pages of the *Yugantara*.[2] Aurobindo's statement has to be read in this perspective.

Aurobindo supported active resistance provided passive resistance failed. In his famous article "The Morality of Boycott" he stated: "The Gita is the best answer to those who shrink from battle as a sin and aggression as a lowering of morality."[3] He also referred at times to the *Svadharma* of the Kshatriya. The morality of the warrior caste teaches violence in times of war; boycott being a kind of war, violence was justified therein. The burning and drowning of British goods might be illegal and inexpedient but certainly was never morally reprehensible. The Americans drowned British goods in the ocean, and if they were not blamed there is no reason why Indians should be blamed if they did the same. Such actions could be criticized because they disturbed social peace, but could never be con-

[1] *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, p. 77: "In a subject nationality to win liberty for one's country is the first duty of all, *by whatever means*. . . ." (Our italics).

[2] For the doctrines of the *Yugantara*, V. Chirol, *India*, pp. 120-1.

[3] Aurobindo, "The Morality of Boycott", *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, p. 81.

sidered morally unjustifiable. Aurobindo said that the Indian leaders were averse to following the American precedent, not on moral grounds, but because the political situation was not favourable. "Justice and righteousness are the atmosphere of political morality but the justice and righteousness of the fighter, not of the priest. Aggression is unjust only when unprovoked."[1] The work of political emancipation was a great and holy *Yajna*—sacrifice; and national education, boycott and Swadeshi were its rituals. "Liberty is the fruit we seek from the sacrifice, and the Motherland the goddess to whom we offer it; into the seven leaping tongues of the fire of the *Yajna* we must offer all that we are and all that we have, feeding the fire even with our blood and lives and happiness of our nearest and dearest; for the Motherland is a goddess who loves not a maimed and imperfect sacrifice, and freedom was never won from the gods by a grudging giver."[2] The political struggle necessitated unreserved consecration and surrender. But as in the older sacrificial rituals there were demons, *Rakshasas*—the powers of darkness and evil, who wanted to stop the successful consummation of the sacrifice, so also the political *Yajna* had its demons. Passive resistance was the method to deal with them just as the ancient peaceful Brahmins resorted to spiritual and moral powers—*Brahmateja*. But sometimes, in extreme cases, the power of the Kshatriya had to be solicited to supplement the *Teja* of the Brahmin. Hence "we should have the bow of the Kshatriya ready for use, though in the background. Politics is especially the business of the Kshatriya, and without Kshatriya strength at its back, all political struggle is unavailing."[3] Politics is the totality of the action of the vast masses for the acquisition of political power and therefore mass psychology had to be taken into consideration in the discussions of political ethics, and not the moral elevation of a saintly individual concerned with subtle and sophisticated ethical judgments and distinctions. To judge mass action by the criteria of saintly norms was highly unrealistic and showed a lack of appreciation of normal human psychology. "Politics is the realm of the Kshatriya and the morality

[1] *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, p. 87.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 77-8.
[3] *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, pp. 77-8.

of the Kshatriya ought to govern our political action. To impose in politics the Brahmanical duty of saintly sacrifice is to preach *Varnasankara*."[1] According to traditional Hindu sociology and psychology all the four castes (Varnas) have their specific and particular duties and vocations necessitating the use of specific means for the realization of definite aims. Hence the commensurability of means had to be judged with reference to the particular value-systems and ideational-psychological constellations centring round the Dharma of each caste, and to preach any universal norm would be to introduce social chaos and confusion. What a Brahmin could not do a Kshatriya could, and vice versa. The Kshatriya could resort to violence in self-protection. On the basis of the ancient teachings of the Gita Aurobindo advocated violence in retaliation. "If the instruments of the executive choose to disperse our meetings by breaking the heads of those present, the right of self-defence entitles us not merely to defend our heads but to retaliate on those of the head-breakers. . . . Nor does resistance pass into the aggressive stage so long as it resists coercive violence in its own kind and confines itself to repelling attack. . . . Nor is it [the New Party] inclined to be hysterical over a few dozen of broken heads."[2] He referred constantly to the classical arguments of Krishna who passionately condemned Arjuna's wish to desist from battle because it would entail violence to kinsmen. Liberty is the central vital being, the precious life-breath of a nation and when it was jeopardized by the violent and coercive methods of an alien imperialism, "any and every means of self-preservation becomes right and justifiable."[3] Aurobindo supported the use of violence by the Russian revolutionaries and the Irish patriots.[4] Defending armed revolt as a political weapon, he referred to its historical role in the struggle of the oppressed whenever and wherever the latter had been able to use it with success. As a political method also it was useful because "it is the readiest and the swiftest, the most thorough in its results, and demands the least powers of endurance and suffering and the smallest and briefest sacrifices".[5] Hence he

[1] "The Morality of Boycott", *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, pp. 81-3.
[2] *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, pp. 62-5.
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 30-1. [4] *Ibid.*
[5] Sri Aurobindo, *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, pp. 28-9.

asserted: "Passive resistance cannot build up a strong and great nation unless it is masculine, bold and ardent in its spirit and ready at any moment and at the slighest notice to supplement itself with active resistance. We do not want to develop a nation of women who know only how to suffer and not how to strike."[1] To kill national enemies in a "Dharma-Yuddha" was also a part of Dharma.[2] Aurobindo supported political violence and armed revolt not only on grounds of the social vocation or Dharma of the Kshatriya, but also with reference to the philosophic theory of the cosmic destruction by Mahakali as developed in the Puranas and the Tantra. Mahakali is the supreme embodiment of the cosmic destructive energy imbued with powerful intensity and passion, "a divine violence rushing to shatter every limit and obstacle".[3] For the purpose of immediate and dynamic effectuation of her cosmic purpose she assumes the tempestuous role of the wielder of violent force and sweeps and demolishes everything before her. If the great mother herself resorts to force and violence, there could be no moral and metaphysical argument against its use by a political group for the redemption of the country which also was an aspect of the great mother.

The concept of violence represents one of the most important problems of politics as a dynamic science of social techniques and methods. But in modern Indian thought and practice, non-violence, with the rise of Gandhi, assumed a supremely important role. But Gandhian non-violence partook far more of the spirit of the Western Quakers, pacifists and Tolstoy than it did of the Rigveda, the Vedanta or the Gita. All the political leaders of the Extremist school of the Indian freedom movement accepted violence as a legitimate political means. There was almost a general agreement that the Buddhist philosophy of total non-violence has been a factor leading to national ruin and collapse, because the Hindus who believed in this doctrine could not successfully oust the Moslem invaders. Vivekananda also considered the indiscriminate Buddhist Ahimsa a factor which brought ruin upon India.[4] Tilak defended political

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, p. 65.
[2] Sri Aurobindo, *Dharma Aur Jatiyata* (in Hindi), p. 43.
[3] Quoted in pp. 150-1, *Sri Aurobindo Mandira Annual*, 1942.
[4] *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. V, p. 317.

murder on the basis of the Gita. Defending the murder of Afzal Khan by Shivaji, Tilak said: ". . . as the Divine Krishna tells us in the Bhagavadgita that we may kill even our teachers and our kinsmen and no blame attaches if we are not actuated by selfish desires."[1] In interpreting the Gita as supporting righteous violence if resorted to in the course of the disinterested pursuit of one's vocation, Tilak and Aurobindo certainly are genuinely representing the old Vedic and Vedantic spirit. It is a mistake to interpret the numerous references to violence in theVedic texts and the Gita as having only an analogical or allegorical relevance. Aurobindo's support of active resistance and boycott brings out the realistic character of his political philosophy.[2] In the article "The Morality of Boycott" he defended boycott as a legitimate political technique against the attacks of Tagore. His concept of politics as the Dharma of the Kshatriya also demonstrates his realism.

The conception of politics as the Dharma of the Kshatriya not only indicates the revivalistic element in Indian nationalism but is also significant in its demonstration of the integral sociological outlook and orientation of the Hindu mind. The complicated pluralization and departmentalization of life into various segments—politics, economics, religion and morals, is primarily a product of modern Western society, consequent upon the distintegration of the universalistic role of the medieval empire and the medieval church. The ancient Hindus always conceived of Dharma as the totality of social, political, moral, religious and spiritual norms, and so the idea of politics as a part of *Svadharma* has also become incorporated in modern Indian political thought. This is further significant because in modern India emphasis has been laid on drawing secularistic and sociological implications from the old scriptures and metaphysics. The idea of politics as *Svadharma* has its parallel not in modern Western political thought[3] but in the Platonic idea of all the

[1] Tilak's presidential speech at Raigarh, quoted in Chirol, *Indian Unrest.* The original Marathi can be consulted in the *Kesari*, 15 June, 1897.

[2] Aurobindo has wanted passive resistance to be "masculine, bold and ardent". He did not want Indians to be a nation who know only how to suffer and not how to strike.—*The Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, p. 65.

[3] F.H. Bradley, "My Station and Its Duties", *Ethical Studies*, is teaching not merely conformity to the rules of one's station in the moral community but a great amount of social constraint and authoritarianism.

three classes—husbandmen, auxiliaries and the guardians, performing their own duties and thereby conducing to the attainment and accentuation of virtue, the harmonious integralization of which leads to *Dike* or justice. Aurobindo extends the Gita concept of *Svadharma.* The Bhagavadgita refers only to the Dharma of individuals, determined with reference to the Varna they belong to. But according to Aurobindo, groups, and even the nation, have their *Svadharma.* Aurobindo also spoke at times of the *Yugadharma*—the Dharma of the particular age, significantly operating with reference to the will of the *Zeitgeist* or the Mahakala or the Kala of the Gita.

Since politics is a very significant sector of human existence, the question of its relation to the integral philosophic idealism of Aurobindo becomes relevant. In his later writings at Pondichery, when he had broken all political connexions and concentrated only on the supramental techniques of total transformation, Aurobindo stated: "Politics as such has nothing to do with the spiritual life."[1] The spiritual man, if he did anything for his country, did so not out of political altruism or on account of political sentiments of common good, but only in order to serve the divine and as a part of the work of God. He denied that philanthropy and humanitarianism were a part of his Yoga. The main object of Yoga was not social service but the attainment of divine consciousness. He wrote: "I do not know why you drag in humanitarianism, activism, philanthropy, *seva*, etc. None of these are part of my Yoga or in harmony with my works, so that they do not touch me. I never thought that politics or feeding the poor . . . would lead straight to the Absolute."[2] But during his career as a nationalist leader and even in *The Synthesis of Yoga* he accepted that "all (mental and physical sciences, and the social, political, linguistic sciences, art etc.) that seeks, all that finds, all that voices or figures is a realisation of something of the play of the Infinite and to that extent can be made a means of God-realisation or of divine formation."[3] Once he considered the supramental Yoga to be the only alternative to political destruction, to "Hitlers and a

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *Letters, First Series,* p. 91.
[2] Sri Aurobindo, *Letters, Second Series,* p. 9; Sri Aurobindo, *More Lights on Yoga,* p. 17.
[3] *The Synthesis of Yoga,* p. 113.

collapsing civilisation."[1] During his early nationalist days Aurobindo considered Yoga to be the supreme means of political success. In his speeches and writings he spoke of the necessity for spiritual power for effectuating the political emancipation of the country. In the Uttarpara speech of 1909 he enunciated the view that divine strength was needed for political success. He is reported to have assured Lala Lajpat Rai in the course of an interview in 1925 that he was practising Yoga for the political salvation of India. In the Ramayana and the Mahabharata there are stories of heroes resorting to Yogic austerities for success in wordly enterprises. Rama, Arjuna and Karna are examples. But still the idea that Yoga could be the necessary means to political success sounded new in the context of modern realism and scientific materialism. We do not find any trace of this idea in Vivekananda or Dayananda or Tilak. Gandhi stressed the need of moral purification and partly of *Hatha Yoga* for a Satyagrahi, but not of Yoga in the psychological and esoteric sense. In Gandhi the stress was at most on a mental culture and discipline; Aurobindo always referred to inward contemplation. We have to distinguish two levels of thought in Aurobindo with reference to the relationship between Yoga and success in the realization of immediate terrestrial objectives. As a nationalist leader he thought of politics as *Svadharma* and emphasized the necessity of Yoga, *Sadhana* and *Jnana* for achieving the destined freedom of India; but in his Pondichery days he concentrated more and more on the notion of a total abnegation of all local and egoistic attachments to the family, to friends and even to the country if one is to make a complete surrender to the divine and become only an instrument of God's work in the world.

But if we consider the earlier ideas of Aurobindo about the total transcendence of the ego and the realization of God in the lives of the millions and millions of India's inhabitants,[2] and analyse it together with the Gandhian idea of service to country and humanity as the only means to the realization of God, we find that a profound transformation has been made of the spirit of the ancient Vedanta to which both Aurobindo

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *Letters, Second Series*, p. 342.
[2] Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, p. 27.

and Gandhi adhere. According to Gandhi, "service of the country, service of humanity and self-realisation or knowledge of God are synonymous terms".[1] The notion of service to the country as a means for the realization of the cosmic spirit is a unique note in modern Indian political thought. In the early European patristic and scholastic theology the stress was never on social service. The Christian emphasis on social service was inspired by the rise of medieval monasticism. The Dominican Friars emphasized service to man. The Knights Templars and the Knights Hospitalers also did social and political work. But still we do not get the exact parallel of the Gandhian idea in the West, because there the spiritual process of a dynamic identity with the ultimate spiritual reality has never been emphasized as in India. Christian critics are, however, correct in their statement that the modern stress on social service and humanitarianism in Indian thought and practice has been strengthened by contact with Western civilization and Christianity. But the logic behind Indian thought is unique. According to Indian leaders social service is not so much valuable in itself but more so as a technique for ego-expansion and growing identification with larger units, since all of them are manifestations of the same spiritual reality. While Christianity emphasizes social service as service to the man-God, Indian thought emphasizes social service as a means to cosmic consciousness. The stress on disinterestedness and detachment is stronger in the Indian context. But although Aurobindo's earlier ideas regarding the moral value of political action were similar to those of Gandhi, the ultimate difference between them is also significant and appears in their interpretation of the Bhagvadgita. Both Gandhi and Aurobindo are inspired by the concept of *Lokasamgraha* as maintained by Krishna, as the motivation of action for the man of realization. But in Tilak and Gandhi the emphasis on the sociological and psychological orientation is strong. They emphasize social and political service but with supreme insistence on non-attachment.[2] According to Aurobindo the Gita does not teach social service but the doctrine of transfiguration

[1] Mahatma Gandhi's article on "Maganlal Gandhi", *Young India*, 26 April 1928.

[2] Tilak stresses *Samya buddhi*, while Gandhi stresses *Anasakti*.

of man into a willing agent of the divine, and hence it preaches spiritualized divine action.[1] According to Tilak and Gandhi one should not be attached to the consequences of courses of action and behaviour; according to Aurobindo the person is to be neutral both to the consequence and to the action and he emphasizes surrender to God as the supreme message of the Gita. The differences in their interpretations of the Gita perhaps also influenced their political careers, because while Tilak and Gandhi both continued social and political work till the end of their careers, Aurobindo after a brief political life concentrated on supramental transformation and the attainment of higher spiritual powers on earth.

10. THE DOCTRINE OF PASSIVE RESISTANCE

As a political leader and writer Aurobindo made an intense and passionate appeal for passive resistance, or, as it could be more comprehensively termed, defensive resistance. He regarded Pherozshah Mehta and some of his colleagues who were the exponents of the "opposition-cum-co-operation theory" as anachronistic in their outlook. He was against the Moderates' theory of "politics of petition" and along with Tilak belonged to the Extremist section.[2] In place of prayer, petition, protest and "please", he advocated the more radical policy of boycott. He was realistic enough to visualize that if other nations had won the precious prize of liberty by intense suffering, humiliations and martyrdom, then "merely by spending the ink of the journalist and petition-framer and the breath of the orator" India could not advance one yard nearer to freedom.[3] Aurobindo condemned the politics of petitioning as "the dream of timid inexperience, the teaching of false friends who hope to keep us in perpetual subjection, foolish to reason, false to experience".[4] The Moderates, according to him, displayed only

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita* (American edition), pp. 282-4.

[2] In his own province of Bengal, Aurobindo took a leading part in the enthusiastic propaganda for a new exalted and self-reliant patriotism. He was very active at the time of the Barisal Conference of 1906, at the Midnapore Conference of 1907 and the Hoogly Conference of 1909. At the national level, he was a very significant figure in the Calcutta Congress of 1906 and the Surat Congress of 1907.

[3] Sri Aurobindo, *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, p. 71.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 70.

a spirit of sentimental moral enthusiasm or at least an inoffensive philanthropic patriotism.[1] This attitude was suited not for realistic politics but for saints and philosophers—"saints like the editor of the *Indian Mirror* or philosophers like the ardent Indian liberals who sit at the feet of Mr. John Morley".[2] He condemned the imitative trends of Indian politics in the nineteenth century and the domination of "English books".[3] He detested being patronized by the British. He vehemently repudiated the unfounded view of English superiority and Indian inferiority which, he felt, subconsciously dominated the actions of nineteenth century Indian politicians. He claimed that the New Politics of the Extremist school had strong empirical foundations and was faithful to the vital traditions of Indian history and culture. "The school of politics which we advocate is not based upon abstractions, formulas and dogmas, but on practical necessities and the teaching of political experience, common sense and the world's history."[4] Hence the *Bande Mataram*, the organ of the Nationalist Party in Bengal, advocated reliance on one's own efforts and passive resistance.

Aurobindo outlined three essential conditions for national progress through the actualization of Swaraj.[5] First, an unhindered intellectual growth and independent motion and

[1] In a presidential speech at the College Square, Calcutta, Aurobindo criticized the attitude of Gopal Krishna Gokhale. He said: "The ruler of Bengal in his speech spoke in approval of a certain speech made by Mr. Gokhale at Poona recently. In that speech Mr. Gokhale declared that the ideal of independence was an ideal which no sane man could hold. He said that it was impossible to achieve independence by peaceful means and the people who advocate the peaceful methods of passive resistance are men who, out of cowardice, do not speak out the thought that is in their heart. That idea of Mr. Gokhale has been contradicted beforehand by the Sessions Judge of Alipore and even an Anglo-Indian paper was obliged to say that Mr. Gokhale's justification of the repressions on the ground that stern and relentless repression was the only possible attitude the Government could adopt towards the ideal of independence was absurd because the ideals and the thoughts of a nation could not be punished. This was a very dangerous teaching which Mr. Gokhale introduced into his speech, that the ideal of independence—whether we call it Swaraj or autonomy or Colonial Self-Government, because these two things in a country circumstanced like India meant in practice the same—cannot be achieved by peaceful means; Mr. Gokhale knows or ought to know that this ideal which he decries is deeply rooted in the minds of thousands of people and cannot be driven out. He has told the ardent hearts which cherish this ideal of independence and are determined to strive towards it that their ideal can only be achieved by violent means. If any doctrine can be dangerous, if any teacher can be said to have uttered words dangerous to the peace of the country, it is Mr. Gokhale himself."

[2] *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, p. 5.

[3] *Ibid.* [4] *Ibid.*, pp. 66-7. [5] *Ibid.*, pp. 4-11.

action which only could encourage and foster national progress by providing an antithesis to the "fatal dependence, passivity and helplessness" into which the country had fallen. It was therefore that an independent party had been formed which could place its programme before the country. Secondly, the "organization of the national will" in a strong central authority. To attain this object a Central National Committee had been formed and conferences were organized at the sub-divisional, district and provincial levels. It was essential to organize a "central authority, which will be a popular Government in fact though not in name".[1] This popular authority was to exist side by side and in rivalry with a despotic foreign authority. Thirdly, organized resistance.

A nation could vindicate its desire for autonomous political existence in three ways.[2] First, there was the traditional method of armed military revolt or insurrection. Secondly, organized aggressive resistance—for example, the Russian method of assassination, riots, strikes and agrarian risings. Thirdly, passive resistance as preached by Parnell who advocated non-payment of rent in Ireland. Aurobindo draws a distinction between passive and aggressive resistance.[3] Aggressive resistance entails the resistance to an unjust law by the destruction of the mechanism which makes and supports that law. Passive resistance, on the other hand, aims at rendering ineffective the institution and operation of an unjust law. It concentrates upon organized disobedience to a harsh law and thereby insists upon its withdrawal. Under a certain set of situations and conditions disobedience to an unjust law becomes not only legally justifiable but even an imperative moral duty. According to Aurobindo, ". . . a law imposed by a people on itself has a binding force which cannot be ignored except under extreme necessity: a law imposed from outside has no such moral sanction; its claim to obedience must rest on coercive force or on its own equitable and beneficial character and not on the source from which it proceeds. If it is unjust and oppressive, it may become a duty to disobey it and quietly

[1] *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, p. 5.
[2] *Ibid.*,
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 53.

endure the punishment which the law has provided for its violation."[1]

Passive resistance, according to Aurobindo, was based upon non-cooperation[2] and suffering.[3] The people were not to co-operate with the instituted political mechanism of the governmental authority "until it gives us what we consider to be our rights".[4] But in the process of non-cooperation the government would certainly inflict punishment and persecutions. These were to be borne by the people and no recourse was to be had to violent methods.

There were three canons of passive resistance.[5] First, to break an unjust cocercive law is not only justifiable but under given circumstances it could become a duty.[6] Secondly, to resist an unjust executive order or corrcive interference could be not only justifiable but under certain circumstances became a duty. Thirdly, the social boycott and excommunication of traitors and others who engaged in treasonable activities against the nation were legitimate.[7]

Passive resistance was the negative, and self-help the positive, side of the movement to obtain an explicit and dynamic realization of the national consciousness. According to the programmes formulated by the Nationalist Party, the industrial system operated by foreigners was to be resisted and in its place the idea of Swadeshi was to be practised. The judicial system maintained through the British courts was to be avoided and arbitration was to be practised. National education was to be

[1] *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, p. 53.

[2] In a presidential speech delivered in the College Square, Calcutta, Sri Aurobindo said: "If you take away our primary rights all that is left for us is passive resistance and peacefully to suffer, peacefully to refuse the parody of co-operation which we are asked to give."

[3] Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, p. 148. [4] *Ibid.*

[5] *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, pp. 53-6.

[6] Aurobindo openly adovcated the breaking of law in certain cases. On this point there is a remarkable kinship between the political thought of Aurobindo and Gandhi. But Tilak, although he was the recognized leader of the Nationalist Party, never openly sanctioned the breaking of law. In his political statements and speeches Tilak was always more cautious than his colleagues of the Bengal school of Extremists.

[7] Aurobindo exhorted all earnest people to follow the advice of Mr. Subramaniya Aiyar to his countrymen in Madras—"Boycott foreign goods and boycott those who use foreign goods." Aurobindo advocated this policy of social boycott of persons "guilty of treason" to the nation. He felt that the boycott of things could not be effective without the boycott of persons.

increasingly fostered in place of the educational system of the foreign bureaucracy, and a league of mutual defence was to replace the executive set-up.[1] The philosophy and techniques of the Passive Resistance movement in Bengal (1905-1907) thus anticipated many of the Gandhian techniques of non-cooperation. Aurobindo stated: "... if Indians no longer consented to teach in government schools or work in the government offices, or serve the alien as police, the administration could not continue for a day."[2] This statement could have as well come from Gandhi's pen. The watchword of the Indian movement, according to Aurobindo, should be "no control, no cooperation".[3]

Referring to the services of Romesh Chandra Dutt in the national cause, Aurobindo stated that the damning and condemned story of England's commercial and fiscal transactions with India as revealed in the writings of the great Indian historian and economist, prepared the public mind, especially of Bengal, for the boycott.[4] But more than the boycott, the strongest element in passive resistance was the refusal to pay taxes.[5] Aurobindo provided historical examples to substantiate his thesis. It had been successfully resorted to by the American colonists, by the Irish agitationists and by the dissenters to the Education Act of the Conservative Government in England.[6] In the seventeenth century struggle against Stuart absolutism, there was the classic case of Hampden's refusal to pay the ship money. Hampden provided an inspiring example to others.[7]

[1] *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, pp. 39-40.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 38. The New School prescribed a policy of fourfold boycott: (*i*) industrial boycott, (*ii*) judicial boycott, (*iii*) educational boycott and (*iv*) executive boycott. It stressed the positive fourfold policy of (*i*) Swadeshi, (*ii*) arbitration, (*iii*) national education and (*iv*) a league of mutual defence.

[3] Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, pp. 177-8.

[4] *Bankima-Tilak-Dayananda*, (in Hindi), pp. 66-7.

[5] *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, pp. 40-2. According to Aurobindo non-payment of taxes would be the final form of passive resistance. It would be a breach of legal obligation and a direct defiance of administrative authority. The bureaucracy was bound to retaliate, by forcible collection of payments and by the prosecution and persecution of the leaders and the followers and in all probability also by military and police violence. Aurobindo was realistic enough to realize that the country was not then prepared for this extreme form of passive resistance. It is interesting to note that during the famine in 1896 in Western India Tilak led a movement of no-rent campaign. The technique of non-payment of rent assumed formidable dimensions in the various movements led by Gandhi.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 42. [7] *Ibid.*, p. 49.

But Aurobindo was enough of a politician to realize that the country at that time was not yet prepared for the struggle in which it would be involved by pursuing a no-taxes policy. So he refrained from prescribing to the country this form of passive resistance. The national movement was yet in its early stage and it would be rash to give "an ultimatum from the people to the government".[1] As an immediate policy Aurobindo stressed only a policy of boycott and did not preach the American doctrine of "no representation, no taxation".

Aurobindo referred to the moral side of passive resistance which, though less spectacular than organized armed insurrections and struggles, nonetheless demanded equal heroism and the capacity to suffer. It fostered a sense of unity and strength which were necessary for national cohesion; passive resistance could very well become a school of solid national training. He said: "Passive resistance may be the final method of salvation in our case or it may be only the preparation for the final Sadhana. In either case, the sooner we put it into full and perfect practice, the nearer shall we be to national liberty."[2]

There are three types of revolutions in the world.[3] Material revolution produces immediate, powerful and dynamic results. The moral and intellectual revolution is larger in its scope and more effective in its intensity. The third type, or the spiritual, is the most comprehensive but it needs long years of preparation. The revolution going on in Bengal was not mere external convulsion but it had touched, what Aurobindo calls, the "soul of the nation". The *Zeitgeist* or Mahakala was trying in India the supreme and unprecedented method "of a revolution worked out by moral force and peaceful pressure".[4] After his return from Alipore Jail, Aurobindo visualized the prospects of a spiritual revolution in the world which would be sponsored by the revival of ancient Indian wisdom.

The moral and spiritual foundations of the Bengal nationalist movement were revealed in three ways. First, the deliberate inculcation of non-violent and peaceful means. Certainly violence was not to be utterly renounced but neither was it to

[1] *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, p. 44.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 79.
[3] Sri Aurobindo, *Thoughts and Glimpses*, p. 39.
[4] Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, pp. 167-8.

be encouraged. However, if in extreme cases there were acts of violence, they could be justified on grounds of righteous altruism in the spirit of the Bhagavadgita. Secondly, the emphasis on the need for the cultivation of spiritual and moral energy, both for the leaders and the followers, indicated that the movement was rooted in the traditions of Hindu philosophy. Thirdly, the reference to the activities of the divine force, Sakti, which was operating in the movement to redeem the fate of a people and a civilization whose destiny was being thwarted from fulfilment by a civilization "inferior to ours", provided immense solace to the leaders and the workers in their hour of trial.

According to Rash Behari Ghosh, the idea of passive resistance in Bengal was inspired by the example of the Sinn Fein movement in Ireland and certain political experiments in Hungary. Mahatma Gandhi confessed to having found the idea of passive resistance in the teachings of Jesus Christ who said: "But I say unto you that ye resist not evil" and "love your enemies . . . pray for them that despitefully use and persecute you, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in Heaven."[1]

The theories of political disobedience and resistance are very significant in political philosophy; both in the Western and to a small extent in Indian tradition we find references to its advocacy. The sixteenth and seventeenth century religious teachers and the Catholic and Protestant Monarchomachs also taught resistance on grounds of religious conscience. But Aurobindo's views, although comparable to them, resemble more the doctrines of Thoreau and Laski who also have preached resistance on grounds of moral conscience. His views also partly resemble the Gandhian ideas about constructive self-development of the nation as a *sine qua non* of success in the political resistance and struggle against authorities. Gandhi said: ". . . real Swaraj will come not by the acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when abused. In other words, Swaraj will be obtained by educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority."[2] But Gandhi was a votary

[1] Albert Schweitzer, *Indian Thought and Its Development*, p. 234.
[2] M.K. Gandhi, *Young India*, vol. II, p. 491.

of the absoluteness of the creed of Ahimsa. He was a thorough believer in the overwhelming power of superior love. He would attempt to win the adversary by the energization of the sentiments of altruistic love. Gandhi tried to develop further the European concept of passive resistance which could tolerate external renunciation of violence with the presence of the inner motive and will for violence to the opponent, into the sociology of Satyagraha which marks the resistance of comprehensive soul-force. Gandhi advocated the renunciation both of inner and outer violence. But Aurobindo who was a believer in Political Vedantism and *Dharma-Yuddha* frankly stated that if passive resistance failed active resistance should be resorted to. He would not stress passivity at the cost of resistance. He sanctioned retaliation on the head-breakers. He would not submit to illegal or violent methods of coercion. If the police authorities or unofficial hooligans themselves become rioters and breakers of the peace, passive resistance is suspended and active resistance becomes a duty. Hence Aurobindo stated: "We preach defensive resistance mainly passive in its methods at present, but active whenever active resistance is needed; but defensive resistance within the limits imposed by human nature and by the demands of self-respect and the militant spirit of true manhood."[1]

11. THE THEORIES OF ABSOLUTE SWARAJ AND SELF-DETERMINATION

(a) *The Concept of Absolute Democratic Swaraj*

Aurobindo not only preached passive resistance, he advocated complete independence for India.[2] He did not expect that India could attain the political stature commensurate with her past spiritual greatness by merely being a dependent adjunct of the British empire. He, therefore, advocated "a free constitu-

[1] *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, p. 67.

[2] Aurobindo referred to the "octopus-like hold" which the quiet, pervasive and subtle British bureaucracy had acquired in India. He advocated the formation of a central popular authority in the country which "will have to dispute every part of our national life and activity, one by one, step by step, with the intruding force to the extreme point of *entire emancipation from alien control*". (Our italics).

tional and democratic system of Government"[1] for India and pleaded for the "entire removal of foreign control"[2] and for the achievement of "perfect national liberty".[3] He was not to be satisfied with piecemeal tinkerings and palliatives. He said: "Our ideal is that of Swaraja or absolute autonomy free from foreign control. We claim the right of every nation to live its own life by its own energies according to its own nature and ideals. We reject the claim of aliens to force upon us a civilization inferior to our own or to keep us out of our inheritance on the untenable ground of a superior fitness."[4] He was definitely against the acceptance of colonial self-government as the final objective of India's political efforts. In thundering words Aurobindo declared: "We of the new school would not pitch our ideal one inch lower than absolute Swaraj—self-government as it exists in the United Kingdom."[5] Not the colonies but Great Britain itself was to provide the political model for India.[6] Such an ideal alone could infuse into India the dynamic and stubborn national will that was necessary to consolidate her political efforts. "We believe that this newly awakened people, when it has gathered its strength together, neither can nor ought to consent to any relations with England less than that of equals in a confederacy."[7] The acceptance of a subordinate and dependent status would be detracting from India's national prestige and status. "To strive for anything less than a strong and glorious freedom would be to insult the greatness of our past and the magnificent possibilities of our future."[8] It is remarkable that two decades before the Lahore session of the Indian

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, p. 16.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, pp. 173-4.
[5] Sri Aurobindo, *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, pp. 69-70.
[6] Aurobindo was not in the least enthusiastic about the Morley-Minto reforms. In his Kumartuli Speech he said that it seemed to him that "the reforms give them not the slightest real share in the government of the country, but instead they would merely throw an apple of fresh discord among them. They would only be a cause of fresh strife and want of unity. Those who are led away by the reforms would not only diminish the powers of this country but lead others into the wrong path."
[7] Sri Aurobindo, *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, pp. 69-70.
[8] *Ibid.* According to Aurobindo, *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, p. 17, organized resistance in subject nations "must aim not only at a national government responsible to the people but a free national government unhampered even in the least degree by foreign control".

National Congress in 1929, Aurobindo should have outspokenly sponsored the goal of complete independence for India.

(b) The Concept of Self-Determination

Being a political prophet of the ideal of complete independence for India and a champion of the resurgence of the Eastern countries Aurobindo was inspired by the concept of self-determination as loudly proclaimed during the First World War.[1] Against the imperialistic ambitions of Kaiserite Teutonism, the Allies advocated the cause of free nationality. It was hoped that "a purely psychological principle of free will and free choice"[2] would be the bond of social and political cohesiveness instead of the vital basis of political and economic needs and pressures. President Wilson proposed a league of free nations. The Russian Bolshevists also raised the slogan of self-determination. Aurobindo like several of his other compatriots was hopeful of the possibilities of the Russian theory of free self-determination of nationalities and the Bolshevic offer of a "democratic peace founded on the free choice of nations".[3] "... their [of the Russians] principle was a more advanced, because a moral, principle than the aggressive nationalism which was all the international result of the French Revolution; it has a greater meaning for the future."[4] The Russian ideal appealed to leaders in the East because of its anti-imperialistic orientation[5] and Aurobindo hoped that it could be one of the devices of Nature for creating a better political future. He wrote: "The Russian principle belongs, in fact, to a possible future in which moral and psychological principles will have a

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 254-5: "If it [self-determination] were capable of universal application, if the existing relations of peoples and the psychology of nations could be so altered as to establish it as a working principle, one of the most fertile causes of war and revolution would be removed, but all causes would not disappear."

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 324. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 329. [4] *Ibid.*, p. 330.

[5] J. Stalin, *Marxism and the National and Colonial Question* (New York, International Publishers), p. 74: "Russia's break with imperialism and her escape from the predatory war; the publication of the secret treaties and the solemn abrogation of the policy of foreign annexations; the proclamation of national freedom and the recognition of the independence of Finland; the proclamation of Russia as a 'Federation of Soviet National Republics' and the militant battlecry for a determined struggle against imperialism issued to the world by the Soviet government—all this could not but greatly affect the enslaved East and the bleeding West."

real chance to dominate, and vital and physical necessities will have to suit themselves to them instead of, as now, the other way round; it belongs to an arrangement of things that would be the exact reverse of the present international system."[1] But he has been also painfully aware of the later communist departures from the old revolutionary idealism[2] which had inspired the Bolshevic leaders to offer a democratic peace, founded on the free choice of nations, to Germany. At the time that the Russians proclaimed their "new principle of liberty and democratic peace"[3] they were certainly sincere, but this concept lost its moral and political significance because of the triumph of revolutionary violence in Russia. Nevertheless Aurobindo felt that the Russian principle of a confederation of free self-determining nationalities contained seeds of development for the near future.[4]

12. IMPERIALISM

Aurobindo, since he has been an ardent champion of nationalism and self-determination, has condemned European egoism and chauvinism for intensifying the imperialistic drives of the aggressive powers.[5] Imperialism, of course, is an old phenomenon in human history and as early as the exploits of the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Medes etc., we find manifestations of it. Spengler held that imperialism is the inevitable stage of human history when culture becomes transformed into a

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 328-9. Contrast J. Stalin, *Marxism and the National and Colonial Question*, p. 76.

[2] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 323: "The component states of socialistic Russia are allowed a certain cultural, linguistic and other autonomy, but the rest is illusory as they are, in fact, governed by the force of a highly centralised autocracy in Moscow."

[3] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 329.

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 317, 321. Aurobindo offers a subjectivist interpretation of the concept of self-determination. He says in *War and Self-Determination* (Pondichery, 1957), p. 48: ". . .man must come in the end to the possession of himself as a free self-determining being and of mankind too in a mutually possessing self-expansion as a harmoniously self-determining united existence."

[5] C.F. Hobson, *Imperialism*; E.M. Winslow, "Marxian, Liberal and Sociological Theories of Imperialism", *The Journal of Political Economy*, Dec. 1931, No. 6, vol. XXXIX, pp. 713-58; Fritz Sternberg, *Der Imperialismus* (Berlin, 1926); M.K. Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa*; Rosa Luxemburg, *Die Akkumulation des Kapitals* (Berlin, 1923). Heinrich Friedjung, *Das Zeitalter des Imperialismus* (Berlin, 1919-22), 3 vols.; J. Stalin, *Leninism*.

megalopolitan materialistic civilization. In the Indian and Roman culture-cycles he finds examples of imperialism as "civilization unadulterated".[1] The Marxist writers have championed the view that imperialism is the highest stage of capitalism when the latter enters into the phase of finance capitalism.[2] According to Lenin, imperialism is a "stage" of capitalism, according to Kautsky imperialism is a "policy" of capitalism.[3] After a keen sociological study and analysis, Schumpeter came to the conclusion that imperialism represents the objectless expansionist drive of powers.[4] Imperialism cannot be regarded as a solely modern phenomenon. A theory of imperialism which does not take into consideration the political aggressions and conquering designs of peoples and empires in ancient and medieval periods cannot be an adequate explanation of the phenomenon.[5]

Aurobindo approaches the problem of imperialism from a psychological-political standpoint. According to him empires are only political and not real units. The old Austro-Hungarian Empire was one such political convenience. Aurobindo thinks that imperialism represents the aggressive expansion of the national ego. He cites the example of the First World War. There were two political forces in dynamic action before the First World War. First, the rigid imperialism of Germany and the liberal imperialism of England.[6] Germany wanted the increasing domination of the world by the superior Nordic peoples.[7] The German method was partly a revival of the old Roman idea of assimilation and there was "even a tendency to go back beyond the Caesars of old, to the methods of the Jew in

[1] Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, vol. I, pp. 36-7, vol. II, p. 422. According to N. Berdyaev, *The Meaning of History* (London, Geoffrey Bles, 1949), p. 220, "Imperialism is the technical product of civilization .... It is the bare will to universal domination and organization."

[2] Rudolf Hilferding, *Das Finanzkapital* (Vienna, 1910); N. Bukharin, *Imperialismus und Weltwirtschaft* (Berlin, 1929).

[3] V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (New York, International Publishers, 1939), pp. 90-4.

[4] Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Zur Soziologie des Imperialismus* (Tubingen, 1919); *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, p. 49.

[5] According to Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 107, Assyria, Macedon, Rome, Persia and Arabia were impelled by military factors to attempt the formation of large imperial aggregates before they had become nation-states.

[6] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 311.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 159.

Canaan and the Saxons in Eastern Britain, methods of expulsion and massacre".[1] Secondly, the force of nationalism. "They were the two sides of one phenomenon, the aggressive or expansive and the defensive aspects of national egoism."[2] There were even chances in the early years of the twentieth century that "national imperialism" would spread in the world and engulf the nation-unit,[3] just as the aggressive expansions of Macedon and Rome had destroyed the city-states of Greece and the neighbouring parts.[4] But "the force of defensive nationalism has reacted against this tendency, restricted it and constantly thwarted its evolutionary aims".[5] It is hoped that the engulfing portentous character of "large imperial aggregates" will cease to be a constant threat to the newly risen nation-states of Asia and Africa. Aurobindo wrote: "... it must become a settled political principle with European nations to change the character of their imperialism and convert their empires as soon as might be from artificial into true psychological unities."[6] He believed that the imperialistic egoism of the great powers would have to cope increasingly with the rising concept of self-determination. The latter alone could be the foundation of a free world-union.[7] Meanwhile he had hoped that the "old, artificial, merely political empire may be replaced by a truer and more moral type, and that the existing empires, driven by the necessity of strengthening themselves and by an enlightened self-interest, may come to see that the recognition of national autonomy is a wise and necessary concession to the still vital instinct of nationalism".[8]

13. THE IDEAL OF HUMAN UNITY

The self-assertive designs of nationalistic imperialism and national egoism constitute a danger to human unity and peace; therefore Aurobindo advocates cosmopolitanism and world-union. There should be two stages in the life of a nation.[9]

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 49. [2] *Ibid.*
[3] Aurobindo refers to the expansionist policy of imperialism in Korea, Persia, Tibet, Siam, China, Northern Africa, and even in South America. See *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 311-2.
[4] *Ibid.* [5] *Ibid.* [6] *Ibid.*, p. 190. [7] *Ibid.*, p. 331. [8] *Ibid.*, p. 89.
[9] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 31.

In the first stage which is the process of national unification and solidification, the dominant interests of the national unit can preponderate over other local and sectional loyalties and obligations. In the second stage when the nation has become organized and powerful it should minimize its parochial and territorial claims and should preserve itself in a cosmopolitan organization without destroying its existence as a unit, just as the individual preserves himself in the family, the family in the class and the class in the nation. It is essential to solidify the moral and psychological bonds of internationalism. This is the need of the hour. Aurobindo always advocated a "national religion which we also believe to be universal".[1] He never considers patriotism to be narrow fanatical jingoism or chauvinism but envisages "the ultimate unity of mankind".[2] But this unity can be established only on the basis of equality and not of domination by some powers over the others. "We demand the realization of our corporate existence as a distinct race and nation because that is the only way in which the ultimate brotherhood of humanity can be achieved."[3] The nation-units that are to be united do not have to be coerced, nor has their distinct individuality to be challenged or destroyed. What should be eliminated are only the forces of internal disruption and dislocation. The corrosive forces of jealousy, malice and misunderstanding have to be conquered; "a struggle for our rights does not involve hatred of those who mistakenly deny them".[4] Aurobindo always insisted upon the purification of the national movement by concentrating upon positive national achievements. "Our ideal of patriotism proceeds on the basis of love and brotherhood and it looks beyond the unity of the nation and envisages the ultimate unity of mankind."[5] The nation as a collectivity expresses the cosmic self and is an effective agent in the pursuit and development of human political destiny. It has therefore every right to protect and maintain its autonomous corporate character and existence, but even this right should be

[1] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 2.

[2] Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, pp. 174-5. (The page numbers to *Speeches* refer to the second edition of this book except where indicated otherwise.)

[3] Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, p. 175.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Ibid.*

asserted principally not for egoistic self-gratification but in the interests of mankind.[1]

Aurobindo's view that nationalism is only an effective, necessary and intermediate unit for the growth of human unity is similar to the ideas of Bipin Pal, C. R. Das and Gandhi. According to Pal the ultimate political unit is humanity and the different nations of the world are organic parts of that. The latter needed the cult of nationalism only to organize and consolidate their separate existence and thereby to make their effective contributions to the life of the whole. One has first to be oneself, before one can do something for others. Hence it is essential to galvanize the energies of the nation before it can be expected to render effective services for the advancement of humanity. C. R. Das also defined nationalism in a comprehensive way. Nationalism is a "process through which a nation expresses itself, not in isolation from other nations, not in opposition to other nations, but as a part of a great scheme by which, in seeking its own expression and therefore its own identity, it materially assists the self-expression and self-realization of other nations as well: Diversity is as real as unity."[2] M. K. Gandhi always asserted that Indian independence was necessary as a stage only, and not as the final objective. He stressed the supreme urgency of India's political freedom but this freedom was only a means. Only a free India could render effective services for the good of humanity. At times, in his more inspired and cosmopolitan moods Gandhi even said "let India perish if that can serve the good of the world".

This conception of universalistically oriented nationalism has also been emphasized in Western ethical and philosophical literature. Kant visualized a scheme of perpetual peace. The German humanists like Herder, Wilhelm von Humboldt and some of the German romanticists conceived of a reciprocal synthesis between nationalism and cosmopolitanism.[3] Roman Catholicism with its international ecclesiastical organization has advocated religious universalism. Its doctrine of the fidelity

[1] *The Human Cycle*, p. 83.
[2] C.R. Das's presidential speech at the Gaya Congress of 1922, reproduced in P.C. Ray, *Life and Times of C.R. Das*, p. 265.
[3] Max H. Boehm, "Nationalism", *Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences*.

of the faithful to the Pope possibly runs counter to the claims of an all-absorbing nationhood. But perhaps the greatest European advocate of the idea that nationality should ultimately lead to cosmopolitanism has been Mazzini.[1]

Aurobindo refers to some of the premature attempts at large unifications of mankind, as for example the conquests of Alexander, the exploits of the Carthaginian oligarchy and the political expansions of the Roman Republic and Empire.[2] But these attempts proved unsuccessful because the nation-unit intermediate between the empire and the city-state had not been developed in those days. In the logic of political evolution it is essential that there should be a gradual transition from the city-state to the large empire through the nation. Aurobindo believes that human unity is inevitable and he supports it on metaphysical grounds. "Unity is an idea which is not at all arbitrary or unreal, for unity is the very basis of existence. The oneness that is secretly at the foundation of all things, the evolving spirit in Nature, is moved to realise consciously at the top; the evolution moves through diversity, from a simple to a complex oneness. Unity the race moves towards and must one day achieve."[3] In view of the present political turmoils and the necessity of their immediate solution for the sake of the survival of man, the present and future unity of mankind is utterly essential even in spite of the opposing and antagonistic conditions. As a matter of fact there are two forces working to make the unity inevitable[4]—the cosmic force of Nature's evolutionary

[1] Mazzini (1805-72) in his essay on *Faith and the Future*, quoted in G. Catlin, *The Story of the Political Philosophers* (New York, 1947), p. 708, says: "We believe, therefore, in the Holy Alliance of the Peoples as being the vastest formula of association possible in our epoch; in the liberty and equality of the peoples, without which no true association can exist—in nationality which is the conscience of the peoples, and which, by assigning to them their part in the work of association, their function in humanity, constitutes their mission upon earth, that is to say, their individuality; without which neither liberty nor equality are possible—in the Sacred Fatherland, cradle of nationality; altar and workshop of the individuals of which each people is composed."

[2] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 104-5.

[3] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 296.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 398. Regarding the inevitability of human unity Aurobindo wrote in one of his poems:

"But the blind nether forces still have power
And the ascent is slow and long is Time.
Yet shall Truth grow and harmony increase
The day shall come when men feel close and one."

progression towards unity and the immediately stimulating force of common political, economic and social interests and convenience.[1] Aurobindo advocates a harmonious synthesis of unity and freedom because otherwise there is always the danger that a rigid unity may lead to the smothering of the independent lives of the smaller powers. He makes a distinction between particularism and separatism.[2] The spirit of particularsim can co-exist with unity and can lead to the growth of a healthy spirit of national self-consciousness, but separatist feelings and tendencies are dangerous for a true world union. Due to the increasing contacts between Asiatic and Western peoples there is a chance that a common world culture may evolve.[3] That world culture would imply not the destruction of the independent cultures of the various peoples but the full and perfect evolution of each profiting by others and "all serving by their separateness and their interaction the common aim and idea of human perfection".[4]

Aurobindo would point out three stages in the growth of internationalism.[5] In its idealistic form it was born towards the latter part of the eighteenth century and gave some vague sentimental manifestations of itself during the period of the French Revolution.[6] This was the first stage of formulation. In the nineteenth century it allied itself with the rising forces of socialism and anarchism and developed some sort of a recognizable vital appearance. This was the second stage in the development of internationalism. But in its absolute form it remained the professed creed only of a few intellectuals. The end of the First World War marked the beginnings of the third stage of internationalism. After the end of the First World War there appeared several forces which made the situation more favourable to a free world-union.[7] The disappearance of the Russian empire and the Bolshevic slogan of free nationality helped the

[1] In the modern times the catastrophic nature of war is making imperative some form of unification.

[2] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 61.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 284, 337-8.

[4] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 338.

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 341-3.

[6] We may point to German idealistic philosophy, especially in Kant's *Perpetual Peace*, as one of the sources for internationalism.

[7] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 317.

political emancipation of the oppressed peoples of the former Czarist empire. The destruction of pan-Germanic imperialistic ambitions was another favourable factor. Some attempts were made to organize central Europe on nationalistic lines and even Great Britain gave a qualified recognition to the principle of free nationality in the reorganization of her empire. Only an association of free nationalities can be the real organized form of a world-union.

The League of Nations from which much was expected at that time proved unsuccessful, and one important factor against it was that it was a league not of nations but of governments.[1] Moreover, the League was handicapped by the dictatorship of three or four mighty states who sought to dominate its decisions and actions. The necessary political and psychological confidence of the peoples of the world that was essential for its success could not be marshalled.[2]

Aurobindo would not stand for a rigidly mechanical and centralized world state because this would mean only the external form and not the spirit of unity. Aurobindo is critical of a world state and favours a world union. There are three possible institutional means to effectuate the scheme of the unity of mankind. There can be a centralized unitarian world state but Aurobindo rejects this suggestion because due to its mechanical orientation, it will lead to stagnation and decline of the autonomous spirit of the nations. A strong federal organization of the world may destroy the spirit of national variation and multiple self-expression.[3] A loose confederacy, on the other

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *War and Self-determination* (Sri Aurobindo Ashrama, Pondichery, 1957), p. 79.

[2] Cf. Sri Aurobindo, *After the War* (Pondichery, Sri Aurobindo Ashrama, 1949. It was first published in the *Arya*, 15th August 1920), pp. 5-6: "The League of Nations that was to have embodied it [the new, fair and peaceful world] hardly even exists or exists only as a mockery and a byword. It is an ornamental, a quite helpless and otiose appendage to the Supreme Council, at present only a lank promise dangled before the vague and futile idealism of those who are still faithful to its sterile formula, a League on paper and with little chance, even if it becomes more apparently active, of being anything more than a transparent cover or a passive support for the domination of the earth by a close oligarchy of powerful governments or, it may seem, of two allied and imperialistic nations."

[3] According to Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 339, the application of the American or the Imperial German pattern of federation to the world organization will not be feasible because of "the greater diversity and freedom of national development which this type of world-union would hold as one of its cardinal principles". The application of the present unitarian parliamentary national type

hand, may lead to the eruption of centrifugal forces. It cannot be permanent and may end either in centralization or in disintegration. The ideal solution, according to Aurobindo, is to make available a new psychological factor—a spiritual religion of humanity. This alone will provide a solid foundation for world union or a free grouping of mankind, "the free grouping of nations according to their natural affinities, sentiments, sense of economic and other convenience to be the final basis of a stable world union".

Aurobindo advocates a world union based upon the principle of multiple variation and liberty and enshrining the concept of a free and rational unity. He specifies four conditions for a free world union.[1] First, the stopping of war as the instrument and mechanism of solving political problems.[2] Secondly, the recognition and concretization of the right of self-determination for all peoples. Thirdly, the ordering of the economic life of people by mutual and common agreement and not by authoritarian dictation and imposition. Fourthly, the adherence to and propagation of a religion of humanity which is the basic psychological foundation of a world union. But although Aurobindo had favoured a confederate form of world union, with the passage of time he modified his earlier opinion and in a postscript chapter added to his book *The Ideal of Human Unity* he supported a world state based on the federal principle of organization.

Mere social and political devices cannot bring about the unity of the human race. The enormous successes of physical science in the conquest of nature have, by implication, lent prestige to the mechanical and external devices of institutional change; but according to Aurobindo these are not sufficient. Human egoism is the principal cause of all discords and cleavages and hence the egoism of the class and the nation have

to the world-organization is also not possible. Hence he would plead "some kind of confederation of the peoples for common human ends, for the removal of all causes of strife and difference, for inter-relation and the regulation of mutual aid and interchange, yet leaving to each unit a full internal freedom and power of self-determination, would be the right principle of this unity".

[1] Sri Aurobindo, "The Conditions of Free World-Union", *The Ideal of Human Unity*, chapter XXXI, pp. 331-40.

[2] In the absence of some great and radical psychological and moral change, Aurobindo thinks that a total disarmament would be essential to the assured cessation of war. See *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 258.

to be replaced by love and brotherhood. What is needed is a "religion of humanity".[1] This religion of humanity has to be more powerful and deeper than the nationalist's creed of the religion of the country. It would involve "the clear recognition by man in all his thoughts and life of a single soul in humanity of which each man and each people is an incarnation and soul form".[2] It emphasizes the ascension of man beyond separatist egoism. Aurobindo accepts the great contributions of the Western mind in evolving the idea of humanity. "The idea of humanity as a single race of being with a common life and a common general interest is among the most characteristic and significant products of modern thought. It is an outcome of the European mind."[3] The religion of humanity was born in the rationalistic and philosophical enlightenment movement of the eighteenth century. Since the Renaissance the growing attacks of physical science against the supernaturalism of Christian theology and cosmology were slowly bringing the notion of humanity to the forefront. Man and not God came slowly to be regarded as the centre of attention. Comtean positivism was an attempt at the enshrinement and even the institutional concretization of the concept of humanity.[4] Comte even formulated plans for a positive religion, but except for some very minor successes in South America positivism failed to win adherence because it was too severely rational and intellectualistic. Democracy, socialism, pacifism and the concept of fraternity fostered the idea of humanity.[5] The three gospels of the French Revolution—liberty, equality and fraternity—expressed in recognizable symbolic forms the aspirations of the new religion of humanity to re-create human society and politics in a better form.[6] But these principles, in spite of partial successes, have failed to bring about the promised Jerusalem because they have been too much engrossed in the external form and the institutional mechanism and have made insignificant attempts to change the mind and heart of man. But their failures do not damage the philosophical foundations of these concepts; they

[1] Sri Aurobindo, "The Religion of Humanity", *The Ideal of Human Unity*, Chapter XXXIV, pp. 362-9.
[2] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 360.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 341. [4] *Ibid.*, p. 362. [5] *Ibid.*, pp. 361-2.
[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 366-7.

only emphasize the great need of a spiritual religion of humanity. Aurobindo pleads for the spiritualization of the concept of humanity which has been stressed by European rationalists and sociologists. What Aurobindo is advocating is not a universal intellectualized religious creed to be accepted by all peoples, but a growing realization of the omnipresence of a secret, spiritual, all-governing power and reality and the deep consciousness that "humanity is its highest present vehicle on earth"[1] and that "human beings are the means by which it will progressively reveal itself here".[2] Although humanity is not the highest godhead, still God has to be worshipped in humanity.[3] A psychological and moral revaluation is therefore necessary. Groups and individuals are to be made to feel the imperativeness of the obligations of greater and more inclusive interests, and the necessity of subordinating sectional loyalties and affiliations. But it does not imply the abolition or the annihilation of the intermediate associations of man. Only the ultimate and sovereign character of the associations is to be challenged; they are not to lose "their individual or group-power to develop and express in its own way the divinity in man".

Just as Aurobindo has formulated the ideal of a religion of humanity, so Tagore developed the philosophy of a religion of man. Tagore definitely advocates a humanistic conception of reality and truth. Rabindranath says: "Reality is human; it is what we are conscious of, by which we are affected, that which we express .... Men must find and feel and represent in their creative works Man the Eternal, the creator .... For Reality is the truth of Man, who belongs to all times, and any individualistic madness of men against Man cannot thrive for long."[4] He wants that people all over should pay reverence and homage to "the God of humanity [who] has arrived at the gates of the ruined temple of the tribe".[5] But even in Tagore's thought we find that the uniquely significant empirical person is important in the scheme of things because he is a singular

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 378. [2] *Ibid.*
[3] Sri Aurobindo, *Evolution*, p. 31.
[4] Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, pp. 134-5.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 162.

non-repeatable expression and modalisation of the ultimate spirit. Tagore, however, differs from Aurobindo in putting greater emphasis on the empirical and historical character of man. In Aurobindo the cosmic and the transcendental aspect always has the greatest emphasis. According to Tagore man is the final crystallization of the cosmic creativism of the divine being. Aurobindo also holds that man is the highest creation of the evolutionary progression, but he believes in the inevitable emergence of a gnostic race of supermen who will operate through powers far higher and far more subliminal than the limited mind of man. According to Tagore, God is to be realized by intimate personal feelings and can be defined in human terms and categories. Aurobindo accepts a synthesis of Yoga which integralizes gnosis, devotion, psychological introspection and action. In Tagore the emphasis is on aesthetic communion with God and nature and an expansion of consciousness through humanitarian love and altruistic social service. Aurobindo lays the emphasis on a total inward surrender to the divine mother. But although the humanistic emphasis has been stronger in Tagore, from the ultimate metaphysical standpoint both Tagore and Aurobindo ascribe significance to the divine essence of man. While the European humanists enshrine the values, affections, will and aspirations of the concrete man as an empirical being, Tagore and Aurobindo give primacy to man as the bearer of divine values.

The emphasis on a psychological religion of humanity as the only power for redeeming our political and social troubles has some parallelism with the views of some of the Western idealists and philosophers of history. According to Aurobindo the ideal is the ultimate real; his formulation of the religion of humanity is not a sentimental hypothetical suggestion but, according to his views, proceeds from the real metaphysical nature of things. Since the fundamental essential spiritual reality, with the power of multiple variation and diversity, is the ultimate truth, its necessary political counterpart is a scheme of world union. Plato stressed the unity of the *polis*. He substantiated this conception on the metaphysical basis of the idea of good. The idea of good implies a supreme unity, and from the sociological standpoint this will mean that even in

the social organizations of mankind the ideal pattern should be unity and not factionalism. Aurobindo also holds that since the divine spirit is the ultimate unity, this concept should reinforce the attempts at the social and political unification of man. Thus Aurobindo substantiates his scheme for the future unity of mankind also from a philosophical standpoint. But while Plato remains a philosopher of the intensive community life of the organic *polis*, Aurobindo is a cosmopolitan universalist. In spite of this difference in their political conclusions there is a methodological similarity between them, because both of them substantiate a scheme of political unity on the basis of idealistic metaphysics.

The religion of humanity advocated by Aurobindo is not identical with the humanist movement in Western thought. Aurobindo does not advocate humanism in the French and German sense of an anti-theological reaction against the dogmatics of Christian theology and the stress on the conception of man as the supreme centre of attention. Man is not ultimate in Aurobindo's scheme. Whatever importance he has is due only to the fact that he expresses the divine. Whatever humanism we find in Aurobindo's thought refers to the derivation of man's importance from the divine spirit. Of all Indian writers, perhaps Tagore goes nearest in spirit to the European humanism of Goethe or Herder.

Berdyaev and Toynbee believe that the world is in need of the spiritual dynamic which can be supplied by Christianity. According to Christan interpreters, only the belief in the religious transfiguration of man and the saving grace of the divine being can protect civilizations. In his earlier writings as a nationalist leader, Aurobindo proclaimed that the Sanatana Dharma could be the foundation of a world religion which alone could save humanity from reversion into barbarity and bestiality. In his later writings on Yoga and philosophy Aurobindo has laid the central emphasis on a spiritual transmutation of man and a progressive integral reorganization of the social structure by the incorporation of spiritual powers. Thus, while there is an element of religious parochialism and orthodoxy in Berdyaev and Toynbee, in Aurobindo there is the emphasis on spiritual transmutation of the human consciousness. The

attachment to a specific historical religion is much stronger in Berdyaev and Toynbee than in Aurobindo.

Aurobindo referred to the inadequacy of the conceptions of Wells as outlined in *God, the Invisible King*.[1] Wells thought that political and social action pursued with the passion of true religious fervour was sufficient for mankind. But Aurobindo feels that a consciousness of the internal divine is supremely necessary. In other words, Wells' solution of the problems of man is at the mental level, Aurobindo's at the spiritual. Aurobindo has firm faith in the great power and potency of religion, art and poetry for an immediate apprehension of the inner truth[2] and the enlargement of human consciousness, but he thinks that the real solution would lie in a changed and not merely an enlarged consciousness.

A very important political implication of this inward consciousness of the religion of humanity is the concept of race equality. Since the middle of the last century the idea of race superiority has been loudly proclaimed in the writings of Gobineau, Wagner, Chamberlain, Günther and Rosenberg. We have seen its catastrophic consequences in the devastating techniques of German Nazism. In recent Indian political thought there has been a very pronounced emphasis on human brotherhood and equality. While the European and American anthropologists have shattered the concept of race superiority on the basis of sociological and anthropometrical research, Hindu political leaders have stressed the religious and spiritual foundations of human equality. The Vedantic philosophy of spiritual monism has been invoked to proclaim the equality of peoples. Due to the unpleasant experiences which the Indian minority and even its great leaders have had to face in the race-bound lands of South Africa and some other areas of the world, the idea of racial equality and human brotherhood has been reiterated with great vigour in modern political literature in India. Indian political thought vehemently stresses the cause of world peace and internationalism. In the writings of all the great modern thinkers of India—Dayananda, Vivekananda, Tagore, Gandhi and Aurobindo—we find the supreme emphasis

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *Views and Reviews*, pp. 55-64.
[2] *The Human Cycle*, p. 181.

on human equality. Aurobindo says: "Mankind upon earth is one foremost self-expression of the universal being in His cosmic self-unfolding; he expresses under the conditions of the terrestrial world he inhabits the mental power of the universal existence. All mankind is one in its nature, physical, vital, emotional, mental, and ever has been in spite of all differences of intellectual development ranging from the poverty of the Bushman and Negroid to the rich culture of Asia and Europe, and the whole race has, as the human totality, one destiny which it seeks and increasingly approaches in the cycles of progression and retrogression it describes through the countless millions of history."[1]

14. CONCLUSION

Aurobindo's theory of nationalism represents the synthesis of several intellectual conceptions and categories. Here we find a profound respect for the ancient spiritual, intellectual and vital achievements of the Indian peoples. Aurobindo has a very great veneration for the inspired and elevated utterances of the Rigveda and the Upanishads, and his integral outlook bears a remarkable kinship to the comprehensive attempts of the Gita, Vaishnavism and the Tantra towards synthesizing diverse spiritual experiences and orientations. This deep immersion in the wisdom of ancient India has inspired Aurobindo's revivalistic theory that "Sanatana Dharma itself is nationalism". But his theory also bears traces of unmistakable Western influences. He is not in the habit of mentioning names but his theory of the soul of the nation, we have seen, has remarkable Hegelian affiliations. His conception of the nation as a psychological unit is comparable to that of Renan. Both Fichte and Aurobindo believe in the immortality of the nation. Aurobindo does not mention Burke but several important leaders of India like Surendranath Banerjea, Gokhale and Pal were influenced by Burke, whose ideas were in the air also when Aurobindo wrote. Burke's passion for justice, his stress on the necessity of the consent of the governed in the governmental process and his concept of the religious basis of society inspired Indian leaders

[1] *The Human Cycle*, pp. 78-9.

and it may be possible that Aurobindo has been influenced indirectly by Burke.

There are several contributions from Aurobindo as a theorist of nationalism and as a nationalist leader. He must be given full credit for having advocated complete independence for India in his speeches and writings in 1907 and 1909. It was a remarkable visualization of the future destiny of India, and reveals Aurobindo in the true role of a great and mighty political prophet. There seems to be truth in what C.R. Das said in 1908 that long after his death Aurobindo would be remembered as a poet and prophet of nationalism and as a lover of humanity.[1]

On the theoretical plane, Aurobindo's merit lies in having kept the concepts of the nation and the state separate. He considered the nation as a spiritual subtotality but always treated the state as a machine. This enabled him to conceive of the possibility of full cultural, intellectual and social growth of the nation without unnecessary governmental interference. He never identified the nation and the state as some of the German idealists, for example, do.

Aurobindo's writings and his personal career reveal that nationalism is not a purely political or an economic phenomenon.[2] It cannot be regarded as the mere rationalization of the economic interests of the bourgeoisie. Aurobindo has stated that in India he saw not a geographical or territorial entity but the Mother, and so he dedicated his life to her. This is not to deny the economic factor behind Indian nationalism. Aurobindo asserted that only a popular government could stop the drain of India's resources and foster Indian industry and commerce.[3] In his emphasis on Swadeshi, Aurobindo accepts the validity of the economic grounds of nationalism.[4] The

[1] P. C. Ray, *Life and Times of C. R. Das* (Oxford, 1927), pp. 62-3.

[2] Cf. Bipin Chandra Pal's view: "His [Aurobindo's]only care is for his country—the Mother, as he always calls her. His only recognised obligations are to her. Nationalism, at the best a concern of the intellect with some, at the lowest a political cry and aspiration with others, is with Aravinda, the supreme passion of his soul." Pal's article written in 1909-10 is reproduced in *Sri Aurobindo Mandira Annual, Jayanti Number* 7, 1948, pp. 193-202.

[3] *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, p. 15.

[4] Aurobindo expressed his dissatisfactions with the fiscal and economic conditions of British rule in India. In particular he was bitterly critical of (*a*) the foreign exploitation of the country and the continual bleeding of its resources, (*b*) the chronic famine and (*c*) the rapid impoverishment which is produced as a result of

economic factor behind Indian nationalism is sufficiently stressed in the famous trial speech of Gandhi in 1922. But to interpret nationalistic sentiments as purely psychological or ideological superstructures built over the substructure of socio-economic-productional forces, as Marxist writers do, is to be guilty of over-emphasis and also at times of inaccurate orientations. Aurobindo conceived of nationalism as a pure Sattvic religion and hence he stressed the necessity of spiritual and moral discipline both for the leaders and the followers. I consider that nationalism in India was not the new demand of a certain economic interest-group but was the dynamic result of the clash between the aggressive powerful civilization of the West and the old civilization of the East. Cultural revival was a necessary part of it and we find examples of revivalism in Tilak, Gandhi, Aurobindo, Pal, Annie Besant, Lajpat Rai, Shraddhananda and other leaders and thinkers.

Aurobindo's championship of the cultural and religious revival of India and his passionate advocacy of Sanatana Dharma as nationalism was never a reactionary attempt. He was not reviving the dogmatic theology of the scriptures but the moral and spiritual idealism of the ancient sacred books. His call was for the harnessing of moral forces. The insistence on moral idealism behind political nationalism reveals the depth of Aurobindo's teachings. By his emphasis on the inward sources of national strength he has provided a great gospel for the resurgence of India.

Another contribution of Aurobindo as a theorist of nationalism is his reconciliation of nationalism and ultimate human unity.[1] Nationalism has been condemned by Lord Acton and Rabindranath Tagore. But Aurobindo's nationalism is not any limited and partial creed. He does not believe in the complete consecration and total self-dedication of the individual to the nation. We have seen the excesses of rabid chauvinism and extreme nationalism in Germany and Italy. But Aurobindo

the refusal of the government to protect the people and their industries — *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, p. 36. He asserted that passive resistance as practised in the Bengal Swadeshi movement has been "a means of cure for the basest and evilest feature of the present system — the bleeding to death of a country by foreign exploitation". *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, pp. 22-3.

[1] Sri Aurobindo, "An Open Letter to My Countrymen" (*Karmayogin*, July 31, 1909). This letter is reproduced in Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches* (Third edition), p. 142.

always conceived of nationalism as a stage, although a very necessary one, in the social and political evolution of man. Besides being a prophet of full and complete independence for India, he also simultaneously accepts the realization of the gospel of human unity as an imperative political necessity for mankind.[1] His view that at a certain stage nationalism has to be transcended by a religion of humanity is very significant at the present hour. The growing deadliness and devastating character of wars is making struggle between nation-states—for the assertion of their rights and prestige and honour—a game with the lives of human beings. Modern industrialism, with the proliferative nature of capital, and the credit and trade mechanism, is linking nations together and, as the liberal thinkers in the West visualized, is making warfare an anachronism. Science and technology are gradually creating the external situation which can make possible the transcendence of national sovereignity by constructing an effective international organization. At such an hour Aurobindo's gospel and plan for human unity and a religion of humanity represent his great contributions to world politics and civilization.

Some demerits of Aurobindo's theory of nationalism could also be casually noticed in this connexion. Perhaps he overemphasizes the concept of revivalism. If revivalism has generated the spirit of moral idealism, it also can lead to a reactionary longing for the past and an apathy towards the present and the future. In some sections of the Indian educated classes there prevails a strong belief that the key to political progress and social organization lies in the ancient classics of India, and this generates an anti-scientific attitude. Moreover, even on a theoretical plane, it is extremely doubtful if the Indian classics contain the climax of philosophic wisdom. Furthermore, revivalism and the kindred concept of messianism can sometimes

[1] Aurobindo had been an advocate of a world union organized on the confederate pattern. But with the passage of time there came a significant change in his views. He favoured later on a world state based on a federal pattern. He says, in the postscript chapter of *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 399-400: "The ultimate result must be the formation of a World State and the most desirable form of it would be a federation of free nationalities in which all subjection or forced inequality and subordination of one to another would have disappeared and, though some might preserve a greater natural influence, all would have an equal status; . . . a federal order would then be the most desirable."

generate an attitude of racial pride and superiority and that can be a danger to peace. Albert Schweitzer criticizes the messianic character of Indian thought in Vivekananda and Aurobindo.[1] He says: "Because the thought of India is still unsophisticated, it is still self-conscious and busied with its mission to the world. The deepest thinking is humble. It is only concerned that the flame of truth which it keeps alive should burn with the strongest and purest heat, it does not trouble about the distance to which its brightness penetrates."[2] Certainly it is too strong a predication to call modern Indian thought unsophisticated, and more so when Schweitzer himself calls Tagore the "Goethe of India"[3] and a very noble thinker. We have seen that messianism has some sociological antecedents in the political and social experiences of the people of India. From the political standpoint, however, messianism can generate political aggressiveness, and a strong dose of it should not be encouraged.

[1] Albert Schweitzer, *Indian Thought and Its Development* (New York, 1936), pp. 254-5.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 257.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 249.

CHAPTER FOUR

SOME FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS OF SRI AUROBINDO'S POLITICAL THOUGHT

Aurobindo retired from active politics in 1910. From 1910 to 1950 he lived in Pondichery. These years were mainly devoted to inward meditation, quiet contemplation and self-realization. But he never lost interest in the problems of man. Unlike the mystics of old, he has refused to be satisfied with personal salvation or absorption into the supreme bliss of the great transcendent. Like Plato he believed in the descent of the supreme knowledge for the regeneration of man and society. If in Pondichery Aurobindo wrote his spiritual and metaphysical books, he also brought out two very significant books in social and political thought and philosophy of history—*The Ideal of Human Unity* and *The Human Cycle*. There is a philosophical approach to international politics in his *War and Self-determination*. There are sociological and political reflections also in *Ideals and Progress*, *Evolution* and *Superman*. In this chapter I will try to arrange, systematize and analytically expound the ideas of Aurobindo regarding some of the fundamental concepts of political science like state, democracy, capitalism, socialism, freedom, etc.

1. THE SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY OF SRI AUROBINDO

(a) *The Spiritual Concept of Man*

The individual, according to Aurobindo, is not a mere physical conglomeration and complex of material inconscient force but is a spiritual soul, a being and self-expression of the universal and transcendent spiritual reality. The fundamental purpose of cosmic evolutionary progression is the total divine transmutation of man through the liberation of the entire being of the individual from the domination of inconscience and the limitations of the dividing, separating, egoistic ignorance. The individual is a divine soul and the attainment of spiritual freedom and immortality is his aim. His destiny is the realiza-

tion of the essential unity of the Brahman and the spiritualization of the terrestrial life, and not a sensationalistic and hedonistic immersion in the depths of material self-seeking and vital satisfactions. Looked at from the metaphysical standpoint his temporary or even illusory existence, characterized by the inevitability of physical extinction, represents only the apparent view of his being. Really, man is a presistent individual and spiritual self and his final aim is the realization of a gnostic consciousness which would imply the governance and determination of his life by a unified self-awareness and all-awareness, and this means that he has to obtain and abide in a cosmic and even a supra-cosmic consciousness. The divine culmination and consummation of individual being has been a deep and profound aspiration of the earliest mystics. and seers in Vedic India, in Egypt[1] and in the Hellenic mystery religions. The true individual is "a conscious power of being of the Eternal, always existing by unity, always capable of mutuality. It is that being which by self-knowledge enjoys liberation and immortality."

Aurobindo is opposed both to the materialistic and the sociological explanations of the individual self. Materialists would regard the individual as only a developed epiphenomenon of matter or energy, although qualitatively different from the material source of his origin. Several organicists, sociologists and social psychologists think of the individual as a "cell"[2] of the society but Aurobindo thinks they have a hold only of the "obscurer side".[3] The development of explicit individuality and distinct personality in man is indicative of a definite plan of Nature which intends in him the evolution of a more and more conscious being. "No doubt what comes out in the individual and afterwards moves the mass must have been there already in the Universal Mind and the individual is only an instrument for its manifestation, discovery, development, but he is an indispensable instrument and an instrument not merely of subconscient Nature, not merely of an instinctive urge that moves the mass, but more directly of the spirit of whom that Nature is itself the instrument and the matrix of his creations."[4]

[1] For the description of the Egyptian mystery religions see H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, 6 volumes, and *Isis Unveiled*, 2 volumes.

[2] *The Human Cycle*, p. 305. [3] *Ibid.* [4] *Ibid.* pp. 305-6.

The individual thus has a tremendous evolutionary and spiritual importance because he is a necessary instrument of the super-phenomenal might and consciousness-force of God. The social aggregates and collectivities are fields for the manifestation and revelation of his spiritual potencies. "... [God] having made man in His own image, with the ego as a centre of working, with the race, the collective Narayana, the *Vishwamanava* as the mould and circumscription, seeks to express in them some image of the unity, omniscience, omnipotence which are the self-conception of the Divine."[1] Because of this spiritual conception of the being and destiny of man, Aurobindo, unlike the Hegelians and the universalists, does not stand for the submergence of the individual in the larger social aggregation.[2]

(b) *The Family, the Tribe and the Commune*

The family, the clan and the tribe are based on vital foundations, according to Aurobindo. The family is a larger vital ego[3] and organism that invests the individual with some affectual and social responsibilities by making him a member of a competitive and cooperative life-unit.[4] Sometimes Aurobindo regards the family as the "multiple ego".[5] The origin of the clan and the tribe has its roots in the vital need of human nature for an associational corporate life, and the ready basis is given to it "by the inevitable physical growth of the family into clan or tribe".[6] Aurobindo's views about the "growth of the tribe out of the patriarchal family"[7] is in line with the general conception prevalent among historians. Morgan, however, considers the gens or the tribe to be the original basic social unit, out of the

[1] *The Life Divine*, vol. I, p. 18.

[2] Aurobindo is opposed to the mechanical attempt to cramp and curb the natural evolution of the individual. "Life, state, society, family, all surrounding powers seem to be in a league to lay their yoke on our spirit, compel us into their moulds, impose on us their mechanical interest and rough immediate convenience. We become parts of a machine; we are not, are hardly allowed to be in the true sense, *manusya, Purusa*, souls, minds, free children of the spirit empowered to develop the highest characteristic perfection of our being and make it our means of service to the race." *Essays on the Gita* (Calcutta, 1942), vol. II, p. 337.

[3] *The Human Cycle*, p. 199.

[4] *The Human Cycle*, p. 197, for the "vital" basis of the family.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 199.

[6] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 349-50.

[7] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 29.

disintegration of which families came into being. Marx and Engels accepted the soundness of Morgan's conclusions but a more modern anthropological research is once again pointing out the primacy of the family form among the primates.[1]

Aurobindo accepts the historicity of a primitive commune. "A cooperative form of human society existed formerly in the shape of the commune; but the restoration of the commune as a unit would imply practically the return to the old city state."[2] From his statement that the reversion to the commune means going back to the city state it would appear that the commune does not mean the same social entity to Aurobindo as the pre-governmental primitive commune does to Marx and Engels. He affirms that the oldest communistic societies solved the problem of food and solved it to perfection,[3] but he does not historically substantiate his statements. Of course, we have references in Greek historians to the system of common meals in Sparta and Crete, but that is far from being an example of the perfect solution of the food problem.

(c) *The Society as a Vital-Organic Group-Soul: The Ideal Law of Social Development*

The society also has a vital foundation, according to Aurobindo.[4] Like the family, the society also is a competitive and cooperative ego, only on a vaster scale.[5] The families and the society provide for the collective satisfaction of vital needs, claims, interests and well-being. Aurobindo's view about the vital foundation of the society has also some Western parallels. According to Althusius the society and the state are not the conscious and deliberate creations of man but have emerged in response to the biological drive towards close association and living. The Russian sociologist Novicow holds that from the functional standpoint "society implies the bringing together of certain individuals, between whom vital relationships have been

[1] Morgan, *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family*, *Ancient Society*; F. Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Aristotle accepted the origin of villages in the agglomeration of families.

[2] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 84.

[3] *The National Value of Art*, p. 4.

[4] Sri Aurobindo, *More Lights on Yoga*, p. 115.

[5] *The Human Cycle*, p. 199.

established".[1] But although like some of the Western sociologists and political thinkers Aurobindo refers to the vital basis and foundation of the society, yet as a spiritualist and a metaphysician he accepts that the collectivity also is a formation of the divine spirit and is therefore a soul. According to him "even the physical being of the society is a subjective power, not a mere objective existence. Much more is it in its inner self a great corporate soul with all the possibilities and dangers of the soul-life."[2]

Aurobindo uses the organic analogy in his conceptual analysis of the society.[3] "The nation or society, like the individual, has a body, an organic life, a moral and aesthetic temperament, a developing mind and soul behind all these signs and powers for the sake of which they exist."[4] Since the society is a group-soul, it wants to obtain distinctness and a growing self-consciousness. The growth of its corporate action and mentality and its "organic self-expressive life" amount to its progressive self-realization. Aurobindo draws a distinction between the natural or organic and the mechanized or rational society.[5] The first type or the organic society arranges the modes of its cooperative behaviour and social interactions with reference to "the general sense and instinct or intuition of the group-life". Planned and deliberate calculation and rational organization play a very minor role in it. In India the remnants of what are called the *Jati Dharma* and the *Kula Dharma* represent the surviving elements of an old natural or organic society.[6] In the older infrarational societies what governed the life and conduct of the people was not the state but the group-soul. It had its own evolving modes and patterns of self-regulation, what the American sociologist Sumner calls folkways and *mores*. The rulers were not the creators but only the executors and instruments of the customary institutions constructed by the group-

[1] *La Critique du darwinisme social*, p. 124, quoted in H. E. Barnes (ed.), *An Introduction to the History of Sociology*, p. 427.

[2] *The Human Cycle*, p. 41.

[3] According to Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, p. 52, the society and the nation are regarded as "living organism with a subjective being" in a subjectivistic age.

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

[5] According to Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 220, monarchy is the great instrument of transition from the organic to the rational society.

[6] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 221.

soul.[1] The effective rule and prevalence of these institutions and norms "entailed indeed a great subjection of the individual to society, but it was not felt, because the individual idea was yet unborn and such diversities as arose were naturally provided for in one way or another—in some cases by a remarkable latitude of social variation which government by the state tends more and more to suppress."[2]

The conception of society as an organism is also found in Tagore and Pal. According to Tagore "we have a greater body which is the social body. Society is an organism, of which we as parts have our individual wishes."[3] In the words of Pal "society is an organic whole, the strong and the weak, the healthy and the sick, the learned and the ignorant, the rich and the poor, the virtuous and the sinful—all are organic parts of that common whole."[4] The organic conception of society is a very old idea and is to be found in Plato and St. Paul. Comte, Spencer, Schäffle, Lilienfeld, Rene Worms and Spengler have been its modern protagonists. Sometimes it is used only analogically, but sometimes also literally. Since Aurobindo is a metaphysician accepting the supraterrestrial importance of the individual, he does not pursue the organic conception too far but uses it with great reserve[5] and only to illustrate his view that the society is non-mechanical. The elaborate biological analogies that were pointed out by European sociologists after Darwin and Spencer had formulated their evolutionary scheme are not found in him.

The second type of society or the society in its mechanical and more rational form begins, according to Aurobindo, when political institutions are perfected more and more. At least among the Aryan-speaking peoples the establishment of a kingship with military and civil councils attached to it marked the

[1] Sri Aurobindo refers to some significant institutions: (*a*) the Indian panchayat, (*b*) the Athenian juries and (*c*) the Roman comitias — through which the natural organic society managed judicial administration. *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 219.

[2] *The Human Cycle*, pp. 261-2.

[3] Rabindranath Tagore, *Sadhana*, p. 83; *Nationalism*, p. 9.

[4] Bipin Chandra Pal, *Nationality and Empire*, p. 18. S. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (Oxford, 1940), p. 360, also upholds that society is an organism.

[5] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 12: "For these social units or aggregates are not like the human body in which the component cells are capable of no separate life apart from the aggregate."

beginnings of "the self-conscious evolution of society".[1] Democracy and socialism, according to Aurobindo, indicate the stages at which the self-conscious evolution of society aims to attain quite a logical development. But democracy and socialism do not mark the final crystallization of social perfection, they are only "a first crude and bungling attempt"[2] in that direction. According to T.H. Green, self-consciousness finds its fullest development in political society. The institutions of civil life give concrete expression to the capacities of reason and will and provide fields for their manifestation and realization.[3] But according to Aurobindo self-consciousness can find its fullness of being and realization not in the political society as Green thinks but in a cosmic consciousness.

Constructing a typology of the functions of ancient and modern societies Aurobindo refers to their divergent objectives.[4] In the ancient Hellenic and Roman society the rational, ethical and aesthetic aspects of life were emphasized. Greece gave to Europe its highest art and its magnificent logical philosophy. Rome contributed the rational system of legal codification. In the old cultures of Asia the rational, the ethical and the aesthetic aspects were no doubt cultivated but were subordinated to an all-comprehensive spiritual orientation. The modern societies, on the other hand, are basically political and economic in their aims with some emphasis on the pursuit of altruistic utilitarian and humanistic ideas. But the religious, cosmic and transcendental orientation has been gradually obliterated due to the rise of secularism, atheism, science and rationalism and by what Friedrich Schiller called a general spirit of "disenchantment of the world".[5] This typology of the characteristics of the ancient and the modern societies has been built up by Aurobindo primarily on the basis of ancient ideals and modern practice. It is difficult to distinguish in practice between the aims of life of an Athenian living in the Periclean Age and a modern New Yorker. Moreover, it is a high exaggeration to

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 223. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 211.

[3] T. H. Green, *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation*, p. 23; Cf. Bernard Bosanquet, "Institutions Considered as Ethical Ideas", *The Philosophical Theory of the State*, Ch. XI.

[4] *The Human Cycle*, pp. 194-6.

[5] Max Weber, *Essays in Sociology* (Oxford, 1946), p. 51.

assert that the ancient societies were more ethical than the modern. The growth of a generalized legal system which prescribes a formalized pattern of social conduct for all citizens has made social ethicism more a characteristic of modern than of older days.[1]

The individual, according to Aurobindo, is a soul incarnated for a divine fulfilment upon earth. The collectivity also is a "soul-form of the Infinite, a collective soul myriadly embodied upon earth for a divine fulfilment".[2] The society or the nation or other cooperative organic collectivities are sub-souls necessary for the complex manifestation of the divine. Each society develops a sub-soul or group-soul,[3] character, type of mind and evolves its own governing and ordering ideas and tendencies that shape its life and institutions.[4]

This notion of group-soul seems only to be a spiritualized version of the juridical concept of the group as popularized by Otto Gierke and F.W. Maitland. The historical study of the institutions of the Middle Ages revealed the existence of what Gierke called "*Das deutsche Genossenschaft*". Pluralists profited by these researches. The realists in sociology like Durkheim held the view that the group is not a mere nominal aggregation of individuals but has a reality *sui generis*. The realistic conceptual formulation was historically substantiated by references to the predominance of the group in the social and political set up of the Middle Ages. Its tremendous importance corroborated the view of its being a substantial reality and not a mere arithmetical aggregation of individuals. Various arguments have been advanced by modern sociologists for attributing importance to the group or the collectivity. As a social structural unit it is larger than the individual. Besides spatial extension, it is also temporally more extended and has a longer physical

[1] Refer to the famous Hegelian distinction between abstract right, morality (*Moralische*) and Ethical Life (*Sittlichkeit*). Cf. §150 and 151 of *The Philosophy of Right*.

[2] *The Human Cycle*, pp. 281-2. Cf. S. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p. 355: "Human society is an attempt to express in social life the cosmic purpose."

[3] The concept of the "group soul" and "the collective man" is also referred to in Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita* (Calcutta, 1942), vol. II, p. 337. "Each society develops into a sort of sub-soul or group-soul of this humanity . . ." *The Human Cycle*, p. 260.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 261.

existence. Moreover it is the conserver and preserver of the social heritage and communicates it from generation to generation. Aurobindo possibly takes up this concept of the reality of the group from Western sociology and attributes to it a spiritual form and orientation.

The fundamental aim of society which is a group-soul or sub-soul is to make possible the progressive spiritual evolution of man.[1] Society is a stage in the progress towards universality. It has of course to provide for the life and growth of all men who are members of the society but its ultimate aim is to provide for the social integration and the spiritual perfection of all the members. According to Aurobindo the "divine perfection"[2] of the society is possible only through the perfection and spiritual transfiguration of the separate individual units. The spiritual nature of society has also been referred to by the Austrian economist Othmar Spann who says: "*Gesellschaft ist geistige und handelnde Ganzheit*" (society is spiritual and acting totality). The concrete sub-totalities or the objectification-systems through which society realizes itself are science, art, philosophy, religion, etc. Aurobindo in his conception of the rational fulfilment and synthesis of the aesthetic and ethical cultures advocates the cultivation of these subtotalities mentioned by Spann but he thinks that the true perfection of society means a journey towards "divine perfection".

Aurobindo thinks that since both the individual and the society are manifestations of the divine reality there should not be any antagonism in their aims and practice. Any exaggerated notion of a self-assertive, vital, egoistic, self-fulfilling individual is as one-sided as the equally exaggerated conception of the all-encompassing totalitarian claims of the social collectivity and the social self. A balance—not a mechanical arrangement but a harmonious synthesis—has to be arrived at, and the ideal law of social development, according to Aurobindo, is the rule of perfect individuality and perfect reciprocity —"self-realization is the sense, secret or covert, of individual and of social development".[3]

[1] The inevitable aim of Nature is the "perfection of the individual in a perfected society or eventually in a perfected humanity". *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 10.

[2] *The Human Cycle*, p. 77. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 86.

Both Aurobindo and Tagore on the one hand and the Western idealists on the other are agreed in attributing importance to the organic collectivity. But there are some significant differences between the Indian and the Western thinkers. Aurobindo and Tagore think that society is organic and has a soul or is a soul (according to Aurobindo), but the individual also is a spiritual self. In Western political idealism, as in Plato and Hegel, Bradley and Bosanquet, we find supreme emphasis on the collectivity. The Western idealists, even when they conceive of individual self-consciousness as a reflection or portion of the eternal consciousness, tend to belittle the importance of the individual. There is no emphasis on the sanctity and the sacredness of the individual as a spiritual self. Far greater emphasis is laid on the collectivity, when their respective claims are in question. Bradley even went to the extent of calling an individual outside the society as an abstraction.[1] The enormous importance of the Greek *polis* as a moral and socio-political organism left the idea of the moralizing and socializing role of the collectivity as a perpetual legacy to Occidental thought. The Christian concept of man being made in the image of God did not have so much importance given to it in the formation of the culture-systems of the West. In their political and sociological thought the Western peoples have always valued the Hellenic legacy more than the Christian heritage.[2] Therefore, while in Tagore and Aurobindo we find emphasis both on the organic concept of the social totality and the spiritual-cosmic character of the individual, in Western political idealistic thought, despite the attribution of some importance to the creative value and spiritual destiny of the individual, the central importance of social institutions remains unchallenged. The key political concept of Western political idealism is conformity[3] to the society, the key political concept of Aurobindo's political philosophy is reciprocity and mutuality between the individual and the society.

[1] F. H. Bradley, *Ethical Studies*, pp. 163-4.

[2] B. Bosanquet, *The Philosophical Theory of the State*, (2nd ed.), pp. 10-1.

[3] Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, *Werke*, II, 256-8, quoted in F. H. Bradley, *Ethical Studies*, p. 187: "Hence the wisest men of antiquity have given judgment that wisdom and virtue consist in living agreeably to the Ethos of One's people. . . ."

(*d*) *The Community as the Body of Brahma*

Besides making an analytical conceptual study of the society, Aurobindo also develops the spiritual theory of the community. In modern Western sociology the distinction between society and community has been significantly discussed. According to Sir Henry Maine, the social structures of the ancient world were governed by the idea of status, those of the modern world by contract. Tönnies makes a distinction between the *Gemeinschaft* (community) and the *Gesellschaft* (society). The bonds governing the first are conative and psychological, while those dominant in the second are legal and associational. Durkheim differentiates the material density characterizing the ancient world from the organic density characterizing the modern world. Max Weber distinguishes three types of action, and corresponding to them three types of social structures. To the traditionalist pattern of action corresponds the community; to the affective action, the association and to the rationally expedient action, the society. The historical basis of all these distinctions referred to by Maine, Tönnies, Durkheim and Weber lies in the typological divergences in social patterns, attitudes, valuations and behaviour brought about by the phenomenal growth of industrial capitalism, technology, positive law and administrative bureaucracy. The dominance of affectual and emotional bonds prevalent in the older world has been pulverized by the vastness and the amorphous nature of modern social contacts, and so an impersonal objective legal system, and not the personal considerations of veneration and affection, is the important force in social relations. Aurobindo is also aware of this distinction but he has referred to it not in the conceptual difference between the society and the community but in his typological delineations of the characteristics of the ancient society and the modern society, or still more in his conception of the divergences between the ancient organic or natural society and the modern rational society. According to Aurobindo, increasing rational organization, planning and conscious ordering are the characteristics of the modern social structures. This typology of Aurobindo, constructed with reference to the relative growth and importance of reason in social

matters in modern times, has some resemblance to the views of Ludwig Stein and Giddings. According to Stein, the community is an instinctive product characterized by social bonds of common ancestry, contiguity, etc. Society, on the other hand, represents besides contiguity and association the further element of deliberate and conscious cooperation. Like Aurobindo, Giddings draws differences between the instinctive and the rational societies.

The community, like the society, is also spiritual in its ultimate basis but unlike the case with society Aurobindo does not refer to its vital basis.[1] He says with reference to the spiritual formation of the community: "The spiritual mind of India regarded life as a manifestation of the self: the community was the body of the creator Brahma, the people was a life body of Brahma in the *samasti*, the collectivity, it was the collective Narayana, the individual was Brahma in the *vyasti*, the separate Jiva, the individual Narayana; the king was the living representative of the Divine and the other orders of the community the natural powers of the collective self, *prakritayah*."[2] To this idea of the community as the body of Brahma, which strongly resembles the medieval Christian idea of the Church as the body of Christ, Aurobindo refers only in connexion with interpreting the form and spirit of Indian polity. But this also appears to be his own view because *The Life Divine* contains a similar statement. "The community is a formation of the Reality, a manifestation of the spirit of man, and there is a truth, a self, a power of the collective being."[3]

Aurobindo also accepts the notion of the "soul manifestation" of the collectivity. In each people there is a fundamental soul-idea or life-idea at work and this is the basic sustaining dynamic force in its historical advance. If the people are strong and vital and make constant enlargements and new applications of the power of the soul-idea or life-idea their cultures and civilizations

[1] According to *The Human Cycle*, p. 82, the community "stands as a mid-term and intermediary value between the individual and humanity".

[2] *The Spirit and Form of Indian Polity*, p. 29.

[3] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, pp. 919-20. The community, according to Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, p. 39, is a "self-manifestation of the cosmic Spirit". It has a "corporate individuality", *The Human Cycle*, p. 83. It is "an aggregate life that expresses the self according to the general law of human nature", *Ibid.*

can last for several cycles.[1] In Spengler also we find the concept of "soul of cultures" but while, due to the predominance of the ideas of biological morphology, the notion of the inevitable decline of cultures is emphasized in him, for Aurobindo the spirit is immortal, and the cultivation of spiritual powers can lead to a constant prolongation of collective life and historical existence. ". . . the idea is itself only the principle of soul manifestation of the communal being and each communal soul again a manifestation and vehicle of the greater eternal spirit that expresses itself in Time and on earth is seeking, as it were, its own fullness in humanity through the vicissitudes of the human cycle."[2] If in the course of their historical progression a people are faithful not only to the external vital and material forms, not only to the psychological manifestations of the "soul idea" but maintain their fidelity to the central force of the inward spirit then the process of cultural decline can be arrested and through constant assimilation of diverse social and political features and ideas it is possible for a people to attain maximum natural growth and to "pass without death through many renaissances".[3]

This concept of the spiritual dynamic in history differentiates Aurobindo's political philosophy from that of Hegel. Hegel believes that one world-historical nation represents the concretization of the *Welt-Geist* in one epoch. The period of decline and fall of that nation signalizes "the emergence in it of a higher principle as the pure negative of its own. When this happens, mind passes over into the new principle and so marks out another nation for world-historical significance. After this period, the declining nation has lost the interest of the absolute; it may indeed absorb the higher principle positively and begin building its life on it, but the principle is only like an adopted child, not a relative to whom its ties are immanently vital and vigorous. Perhaps it loses its autonomy, or it may still exist, or drag out its existence, as a particular state or a group of states and involve itself without rhyme or reason in manifold enterprises at home and battles abroad."[4] Both Aurobindo and Hegel accept the manifestation and revelation of the cosmic

[1] *The Spirit and Form of Indian Polity*, p. 19.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20. [3] *Ibid.*
[4] Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* (Oxford edition), p. 218.

spirit (the *Welt-Geist* in Hegel) in history. But Hegel believes in the exhaustion of the dynamic historical power of the different world-historical nations. Only one nation can be the bearer of the spiritual mission in one epoch. After some time this nation must make room for another and this second nation in turn becomes the vehicle for the temporal manifestation of the spirit. History moves according to this pattern. But Aurobindo has a far greater belief in the cosmic historical powers of the spirit which can make possible the evergrowing progression of the same people or nation. He definitely asserts: "And even if at any time it [a people] appears to be on the point of absolute exhaustion and dissolution, it may recover by the force of the spirit and begin another and perhaps a more glorious cycle. The history of India has been that of the life of such a people."[1]

The problem of the relationship between the individual and the community brings out the difference between Aurobindo and Western idealistic political philosophers. Although Aurobindo refers to the community as a body of the Brahma and as a formation of the Reality, yet he always emphasizes the spiritual importance of the individual. But the Hellenic concept of the moral nature of the *polis* always cast a profound influence on Western idealistic political thought. The great importance of the community as a socializing and ethicizing agent that we find in Rousseau represents Greek influence. Fichte also considered the community to be of divine origin and therefore the individual was asked to make efforts for its development. Fichte said: *Das Ich setzt im Ich das Nicht-ich* (the individual creates the other through himself). The human being is to be regarded as a true moral agent only through the community. Hegel comprehends both the civil society and the state under the realm of *Sittlichkeit* (the ethical life). The ethical nature of the community implied the subordination of the individual to it. But Aurobindo always attaches primacy not to the community but to the individual because the latter is not only a manifestation of the spirit but the key of the evolutionary movement. Aurobindo states: "The individual as spirit or being is not confined within his humanity; he has been less than human, he can become more than human. The universe finds

[1] *The Spirit and Form of Indian Polity*, pp. 19-20.

itself through him even as he finds himself in the universe, but he is capable of becoming more than the universe, since he can surpass it and enter into something in himself and in it and beyond it that is absolute. He is not confined within the community; although his mind and life are, in a way, part of the communal mind and life, there is something in him that can go beyond them. The community exists by the individual, for its mind and life and body are constituted by the mind and life and body of its comprising individuals; if that were abolished or disaggregated, its own existence would be abolished or disaggregated, though some spirit or power of it might form again in other individuals: but the individual is not a mere cell of the collective existence; he would not cease to exist if separated or expelled from the collective mass. For the collectivity, the community is not even the whole of humanity and it is not the world: the individual can exist and find himself elsewhere in humanity or by himself in the world. If the community has a life dominating that of the individuals which constitute it, still it does not constitute their whole life. If it has its being which it seeks to affirm by the life of the individuals, the individual also has a being of his own which he seeks to affirm in the life of the community. But he is not tied to that, he can affirm himself in another communal life, or, if he is strong enough, in a nomad existence or in an eremite solitude where, if he cannot pursue or achieve a complete material living, he can spiritually exist and find his own reality and indwelling self of being."[1] The perfection of the community is possible only through the perfection of the individuals. We see thus that the old Vedantic conception of the spiritual worth and transcendent value of the individual spirit comes to the fore in Aurobindo. The differences that we find in Aurobindo and Western political idealism represents in a sense the vital difference between the Vedanta and Aristotle. A believer in "the self is Brahman" or "Thou art That" would not consent to the submergence of the individual in the community regardless of the latter's ethical or spiritual character. Although Plato, Aristotle, Hegel and Aurobindo agree in accepting that the collectivity is not a mere name but an organic moral unit, and

[1] *The Life Divine,* vol. II, pp. 920-1.

although Hegel and Aurobindo conceive of the collectivity in spiritual terms, still the tremendous differences in the views of Aurobindo and the Western idealists about the relation of the individual and the community is vastly significant.

Just as Aurobindo has distinguished the soul and spirit of the nation from national egoism, so also he differentiates between the soul of the community and communal egoism. The ego, Aurobindo says, is only an external false substitute for the central psychic being — the Caitya Purusha. It is a force of division, separation and limitation. It is only a subordinate and superficial formulation of the self-consciousness and self-experience of the subliminal self. The descent of overmental power would lead to the final abolition of the ego. But just as the ego operates on the individual level it can also operate on the national and communal level, and so instead of concord and mutual harmonious reciprocity we get constant struggles between collective egos. A self-satisfied vitalistic consciousness seeks to exalt the communal ego and speaks of it as the soul of the nation and the race. We find examples of the magnification of the cult of the communal ego in pan-Germanism and Nordicism. One does not have to comment on the historical horrors let loose by that kind of perverse political ideology. The communal ego, "this obscure collective being, is not the soul or self of the community, it is a life-force that rises from the subconscient and, if denied the light of guidance by the reason, can be driven only by dark massive forces which are powerful but dangerous for the race".[1] This kind of exaggerated, colossal communal egoism leads to an intensification of the vital struggle for existence, and being a non-spiritual, unregenerate force it can lead to a reversion to barbarity and thus hinder the conscious spiritual progression of mankind. The soul being spiritual in nature the claims of the different communal souls do not have to be competing, leading thus to wars and strifes. The aggrandizement of the ego leads to disharmony and warfare and hence the communal ego is as vicious as the national ego. Therefore not the communal ego but the communal soul has to be developed.

[1] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 929.

2. PHILOSOPHY OF THE STATE

Sri Aurobindo has not developed any systematic theory of the state like Hegel, Green or Bosanquet. But I will try to reconstruct a theory of the state according to Sri Aurobindo, by arranging, systematizing and developing his ideas on this topic, as found in his books *The Human Cycle* and *The Ideal of Human Unity*. The general philosophical and conceptual background can be provided by a study of his books *The Life Divine* and *Essays on the Gita*. A reconstruction of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of the state is important because he was one of the important political leaders of the country from 1905 to 1909.

(*a*) *Evolution and Nature of the State*

Aurobindo's philosophy of the state is related to his theory of the role of reason in the socio-political evolution of man. The first stage of human evolution is infra-rational and is marked by the dominance of instincts, haphazard intuitions[1] and impulses. The Jatidharma and the Kuladharma of ancient India are the product of this age. In this age rationalism as a social force is only implicit and it can be called the age of natural society. The "subconscient principle of life within it" is the motive and constructive power of society.[2] The second is the rational age when the communal mind becomes more and more intellectually self-conscious.[3] The third stage belongs to the future and would be marked by greater stress on the supra-rational subjective consciousness.[4] In the third stage the powers of intuition, overmental and even supramental consciousness would be used for the total transformation of man and the divine perfection of society.

The state represents the great instrument of transition from the first or the infra-rational organic stage to the second stage or that of rational society. The state gets its coercion-mechanism regularized and stabilized through the acquisition of the mono-

[1] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, pp. 698-9: ". . . the faculty of intuition and intellect which was already there in the animal. This faculty, prolonged in the thinking being and mentalised, must have been more sensitive and active in early man."

[2] *The Spirit and Form of Human Unity*, pp. 22-8.

[3] *Ibid.* [4] *The Human Cycle*, pp. 228-9.

poly of the legal power of violence and becomes the great instrument for safeguarding public order and efficiency. "The state is the masterful but arbitrary and intolerant science and reason of man that successfully takes the place of the intuitions and evolutionary experimentations of Nature, intelligent organisation replaces natural organism."[1] The history of the state represents an advancing process of political unification and solidification through the development of a central focus of organized power. The condition of man before the emergence of the state is marked by the dominance of ethnic sentiments of kinship. The state is based on territorial centralization which leads to legislative and administrative centralization. In other words, the state is synchronistic with the centralization of political power. A diversity and plurality of centres of political power characterize the early history of mankind. The concentration of political authority took place through the growth of a stable monarchy not only in the great civilizations of Egypt, Babylonia, Crete and the Hittites but also in Greece and Rome. The Vedas contain the records of the growth of kingly power. In several countries the rule of the monarch was replaced by the rule of an aristocracy leading later to the domination of oligarchical factions. Greece is the classic example of this transformation. The dominance of the patrician senate in Roman public affairs provides another illustration of this principle. Although in the later evolution of political consciousness especially in the Western world there has been the growth of a body "whose proposed function is to represent the thought and will of the whole community",[2] the earlier natural or organic phase of human evolution is marked by "a loose and natural unity whose efficiency is that of life developing with a certain spontaneity its organs and powers under the pressure of inner impulse and the needs of the environment and the first conditions of existence".[3] Natural variations, complexities and multiple formations mark this early phase. The rational and mechanically organized state marks the growth of organized legal order represented through the structure of an impersonal bureaucratic mechanism. It leads to the growth of order, efficiency,

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 233.
[2] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 232.
[3] *Ibid.*

rigidity and uniformity.[1] "The intelligent will of the whole society expressed in carefully thought-out law and ordered regulation replaces its natural organic will expressed in a mass of customs and institutions which have grown up as the result of its nature and temperament. In the last perfection of the state, a carefully devised, in the end a giant machinery, productive and regulative, replaces the vigor and fertility of life with the natural simplicity of its great lines and the obscure, confused, luxuriant complexity of its details."[2]

In the political evolution of the modern nations of the West the growth of ordered complexity and rigid legal impersonal uniformity has been consequent on the use of reason in the social and political processes. But this political evolution on the practical plane has been preceded by significant developments in political philosophy. The early use of critical reason was made in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for the quest of individual liberty. The irrationality of monarchical absolutism was demonstrated by political thinkers by the vindication of a rational and moral principle in the empirical man. The writings of the French materialists and encyclopaedists showed that feudalism and absolutism had ceased to serve as socially beneficent agents. The second stage of reason as a social renovator in the modern age was reached when the ancient Stoic conception of human fellowship and equality—*hominum sociatum*, which had been confined so long to the moral field, was given a political connotation. Governmental communism with its proletarian equalitarianism and its advocacy of the deliberate use of force to expropriate the expropriators for constructing a free association of producers, appeared on the scene. While British empiricism and French materialistic philosophy had created the background for the concept of political liberty and individual freedom, German idealism and its dialectical methodology created the foundations of the new governmental socialism and communism.[3] The third gospel of the French

[1] According to Aurobindo ancient Sparta and modern Germany asserted the supremacy of the state idea and ancient Athens and modern France asserted the supremacy of the freedom and dignity of the individuals. England has tried to attain some kind of synthesis. See *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 17-8.

[2] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 232-3.

[3] Karl Marx not only got the concept of the dialectic in the writings of Kant,

Revolution—fraternity, led to the growth of intellectual anarchism which considered the state as a concentrated evil and favoured a voluntary co-operative brotherhood in place of the power-mechanism of the modern bureaucratic state. Thus we can historically substantiate Aurobindo's interpretation of the political dynamics of modern European social evolution in terms of the different uses made of reason as a social principle. Aurobindo thinks that the replacement of the symbolic, typal and conventional eras of human evolution has been made possible by the advent of the age of individualism, with reason as its basic foundation. Human reason dwells not only in the immediacy of the concretized actuality and realized social gospels but also in the realm of ideal possibilities.[1] Thus reason has been a great engine and instrument of progress in history both in the realms of society and ethics.

But although according to Aurobindo, the advent of the state symbolizes the replacement of infrarational instincts, intuitions and natural experimentations as social agencies by social reason, he thinks of the state only in mechanical terms. In actual practice, the career of the state has been marked by the lack of internal checks and scruples and often the pursuit of *Machtpolitik* and *Realpolitik* has vitiated the fair face of the earth. Hence Aurobindo is against the attribution of any ethical or moral character to the state. He says: "It has no soul or only a rudimentary one. It is a military, political and economic force; but it is only in a slight and undeveloped degree, if at all, an intellectual and ethical being. And unfortunately the chief use it makes of its undeveloped intellect is to blunt by fictions, catchwords and recently by state philosophies, its ill-developed ethical conscience."[2] Hence although theoretically the state claims to represent and crystallize the best available political wisdom in the country, the phenomena and dynamics of the state are marked by lustful struggles, sectional and group hatreds and jealousies and the absence of a harmonizing synthetic ethical principle.[3] Oftentimes the state could have accelerated social

Fichte and Hegel but he was also influenced by the activistic nature of the human subject as developed in German idealism.

[1] *The Human Cycle*, pp. 241-2.

[2] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 24.

[3] According to Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 25, the basis of the state

progress by aiding those idealistic souls who have something good to contribute to the community but the huge colossus of the state machine hardly leaves a room for "deploying and using the sincerity, energy, idealism of the best individuals".[1] Hence the organised state is not the representative of the best mind and best idealism of a nation. Often the state comes to be "a collective egoism much inferior to the best of which the community is capable".[2] In spite of all professions of sentimental ethicism and idealism, the actual careers of states sometimes show the unhampered recourse to an expansionist tendency leading to imperialism and occasional brutal mass murders in big wars. The only things that restrain the state in the unmitigated pursuit of power are the calculations of probable defeat and failure, and not any categorical ethical imperative or the canons of international law. It is true that the 'state of nature' which characterizes the external relations of the state also once marked the conduct of its internal politics, but there has been a marked improvement in that sphere, although some deterioration also has occurred in some directions in certain countries. But the state has increasingly transformed itself into a social agency and now it is undertaking several economic functions for the individual and groups. Even ardent believers in free enterprise and *laissez-faire* are accepting partial socialization and state intervention in economics. Aurobindo thinks that the attempt of the state to grow into an intellectual and moral being is a very interesting phenomenon of the modern world. The devastations wrought by the terrible convulsions of war have been like a catharsis to the state and have caused it to think about intellectualizing and moralizing its external relations. "But the claim of the state to absorb all free individual activities, a claim which it increasingly makes as it grows more clearly conscious of its new ideals and possibilities, is, to say the least of it, premature and, if satisfied, will surely end in a check to human progress, a comfortably organised stagnancy such as overtook the Graeco-Roman world after the establishment of the Roman Empire."[3]

so far has been physical and vital. However, after the First World War it has made some unsuccessful attempts at intellectualizing and moralizing itself.

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 23. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 24.
[3] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 25-6.

(*b*) *The Refutation of the Organic Theory of the State*

Aurobindo definitely repudiates the organic conception of the state although he uses the organic analogy with reference to the society. "The state is bound to act crudely and in the mass; it is incapable of that free, harmonious and intelligently or instinctively varied action which is proper to organic growth. For the state is not an organism; it is a machinery, and it works like a machine, without tact, taste, delicacy or intuition. It tries to manfacture, but what humanity is here to do is to grow and create."[1] The illustration of the mechanical nature of the state can be found in countries having state-controlled education. The purpose of education is to create a developed personality by fostering inward growth of a man's faculties and powers. But a state-controlled education amounts to indoctrination and the spread of propaganda for creeds and cults dear to the party in actual power. In several Fascist countries we can see this process of the transformation of education from a system encouraging growth in the valuation of personality into a device for the uniform transmission of the political creeds of the ruling parties. Some apologists of the totalitarian regimes even conceive of a national or state science or a state philosophy. Therefore the tendency to mechanization is the radical defect of the state idea and practice, and intellectual anarchism, spiritualism and subjectivism protest against this tendency. But this non-organic mechanical character of the state is the basic defect of its very foundational principle—reason. "It is the inherent defect of reason when it turns to govern life and labours by quelling its natural tendencies [and attempts] to put it into some kind of natural order." The state must not be considered an end in itself. "The state is a convenience and a clumsy convenience, for our common development; it ought never to be made an end in itself."[2]

(*c*) *The Functions of the State: From Individualism to Socialism*

From Aurobindo's opposition to the idea that the state is an

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 27.

[2] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 26. Dr. Radhakrishnan also upholds a similar view in *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p. 360.

organic conception, and his view of the state as only a mechanical convenience, follows his view of the limitation of the functions of the state. According to him the business of the state is "to remove obstacles, to remove all really harmful waste and friction . . . and removing avoidable injustice, to secure for every individual a just and equal chance of self-development and satisfaction to the extent of his powers and in the line of his nature . . . . But all unnecessary interference with the freedom of man's growth is or can be harmful."[1] Hence he thinks that although it is possible to have a national education, a national religion and a national culture, a state education, a state culture or a state religion represent an absurd monstrosity and an unnecessary accentuation of the power of the state.[2] Aurobindo and Spencer agree that there should be neither a state education nor an established church. Aurobindo speaks as an individualist when he refers to the removal of obstacles as the business of the state.

But it would be a mistake to consider Aurobindo an economic individualist. When he talks about the removal of avoidable injustice and wants the state to secure for all "a just and equal chance of self-development and satisfaction to the extent of his powers and in the line of his nature"[3] he not only reminds us of T. H. Green's conception of positive freedom[4] but has made considerable headway in the acceptance of the socialist social philosophy and he definitely says: "So far the aim in modern socialism is right and good."[5] But though he accepted the egalitarian economic philosophy of socialism Aurobindo would not say that the goal of individual life and the state was the same. According to Aristotle, the end of both the individual and the state is the maximization of virtuous activities.[6] But while for Aurobindo the goal of the individual is the attainment of gnostic consciousness and spiritual salvation, the state is to him, at best, a machine to realize the socialist social and economic ideal.

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 28.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] *Collected Works of T. H. Green*, vol. 3, p. 372.
[5] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 28.
[6] Aristotle, *Politics*, 1334 a.

(*d*) *The State in Idealistic Philosophy*

There are various similarities between the political philosophies of Aurobindo and German idealism, for example, the notion of the supra-mechanical or even spiritual essence and nature of the community, the conception of the progressive manifestation of the cosmic spirit in human history and the idea of the spirit of the nation are common to both. But the differences are considerably important with reference to their views about the state. In Hegelian idealism the individual is at best conceived of as a rational and a voluntarist subject. There is no reference to his transcendental or divine worth and significance. While according to Hegel "the right of individuals to be subjectively destined to freedom is fulfilled when they belong to an actual ethical order, because their conviction of their freedom finds its truth in such an objective order, and it is in an ethical order that they are actually in possession of their own essence or their own inner universality", in Aurobindo's view the spiritually free individual does not owe his final obligation to the social and ethical institutions but to the spiritual being within him.

German idealism, especially in Fichte and Hegel, advocated almost an apotheosis of the state. But though he attributes socialistic functions to the state, Aurobindo's hostility to the state machine is great. Tagore is hostile to the nation and favours the people, Aurobindo is hostile to the state and favours the nation, while Hegel is for the nation-state. While Vedantism led to cosmopolitanism in Tagore and Aurobindo, in Hegel Teutonism led to an exaltation of the nation-state as the final political-structural unit in the progression of the world-spirit.[1]

Both Hegel and Aurobindo accept the rational nature of the state but their conception of reason in a social perspective is fundamentally different. Aurobindo says that the state symbolizes the transition from the impulsive, intuitional and instinctive ways of social experimentation to a rational order but evidently he means here, by reason, the subjective, discursive and analytic reason of individuals and groups. He is only

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 27: "The non-recognition of the possibilities of human cooperation was the weakness of English individualism; the turning of a utility for cooperative action into excuse for rigid control by the state is the weakness of the Teutonic idea of collectivism."

differentiating the infra-rational aspects of a man's life from the rational. There is no reference to the operation of cosmic reason or transcendental reason through the mechanism of the state. According to Hegel "the state must be treated as a great architectonic structure, as a hieroglyph of reason revealing itself in actuality".[1] Hegel is here referring to the operation of reason as the self-conscious universal mind in the phenomena of the actual. Therefore, while for Aurobindo the state is the product of human reason, for Hegel it is the product of the universal mind.

Hegel sometimes conceives of the state as the means to freedom but mostly conceives of it as the objectification of freedom; he regards the state as the goal of individual and associational existence. But Aurobindo thinks the state is always to be conceived of as a means and never as an end. Hegel almost deifies the state. "The march of God in the world, that is what the state is."[2] "We should desire to have in the state nothing except what is an expression of rationality. The state is the world which mind has made for itself, its march, therefore, is on lines that are fixed and absolute."[3] But the emphasis on the universal rationality and the ethical substantiality of the state which we find in Hegel have no parallels in Aurobindo.

Aurobindo's conception of the state is also different from that of the Oxford Idealists. According to Green a state is a collectivity of persons recognized by each other as having rights, and possessing certain institutions for the maintenance and completion of those rights. Its title to the obedience of the citizens is in its recognition of those rights for the realization of common good. Will, not force, is the basis of the state.[4] Although because of Green's deference to the traditions of British political democracy and liberalism we do not find in him the Hegelian identification of the state and absolute right, still he attributes more ethical and moral content to the state than Aurobindo does. On the other hand Green, writing in the late years of the liberal era, attributes less functions to the state than

[1] Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right* (Oxford edition), p. 288.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 279. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 285.
[4] T.H. Green, *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation,* § 132-6.

Aurobindo because the latter is favourable to the economic ideal of socialism.

The differences between Aurobindo and Bosanquet are far more fundamental, the Hegelian influence being stronger on Bosanquet than on Green. Bosanquet regards the state as not "merely the political fabric" but "the entire hierarchy of institutions by which life is determined", e.g., the family, trade, church, and the university. It is "the structure which gives life and meaning to them all".[1] The state is charged with the maintenance of the conditions necessary to the "best life" and it has to protect the form of life of which it is the guardian. The sharp separation between the political and the non-political, which we find in Aurobindo, is not traceable in Bosanquet. The latter thinks that the institutions of society, to which he attributes an ethical character, receive their justification and fulfilment in the state. To Aurobindo on the other hand, the social institutions have an intrinsic immanent importance and do not depend for their significance on the political order.

But in one sense Hegel, Bosanquet and Aurobindo are similar because all of them almost accept the transcendence of social and political institutions by art, religion and philosophy. Aurobindo does not attribute the philosophic supremacy to art which Hegel and Bosanquet do. But all the three accept that the inward self-conciousness which finds its realization in religion and philosophy is not limited by the confines of the actual political and social institutions. As a supramental spiritualist, Aurobindo would also like to transcend ultimately even the absolutism of the religious and philosophic consciousness in the integral spiritual cosmic-transcendental consciousness.

Although Aurobindo partly resembles the Greek thinkers like Plato and Aristotle and the Hegelians in advocating views which are part of the tradition of the idealistic philosophy of politics, there are sharp differences between them. The fundamental cause of the difference is that basically, in spite of all social and political thought-constructions, Aurobindo remains a believer in the Yogic techniques of transfiguration of man. He believes that the individual contains the central spiritual value. Thus, while Aurobindo approaches political problems

[1] Bosanquet, *The Philosophical Theory of the State* (London, 1910), p. 150.

with the presupposition of the central importance of the individual, the Hellenic and German idealists do so from the standpoint of the society. In Aurobindo we find a synthesis of spiritual idealism and the political importance of the individual; in the German idealists we find a dynamic absolutism (in Hegel) and an ethical orientation towards civil and social institutions.[1]

From this fundamental difference in their respective approach to political problems follow certain other differences. German idealists conceived of the state as the source of individual rights. According to Aurobindo individual rights are not derived from the state but originate in the psychological and sociological structure and situation of man, i.e., his *Svabhava* and *Svadharma*. Hegel sometimes spoke of the monarch of Prussia expressing the subjective unity of the universal will and sometimes thought that the universal will could be realized through the state. He never thought of the operation of any general will against the state. Bosanquet held that the real will of the individuals is the same as the general will and the general will is crystallized in the state; he also never conceived of it as something apart from and against the state. Paradoxically, the idealists in Germany and England even went to the length of conceiving the idea that the state, as the embodiment of the general communal will, could at times manifest a will which could possibly be even independent of and different from the will of the majority. Aurobindo does not have a theory of the general will; although he speaks of the mind of the community and the social being he does not attribute to them a realistic and aegilic character like McDougall or Durkheim. He identifies the mind of the community with the totality of individual minds. There may sometimes arise the possibility of a divergence between the mind of the community and the state mechanism. In such cases Aurobindo would attribute primacy not to the will of the state but to the will of the community, because in the last analysis the community is the form of the spiritual reality while the state is a mechanical convenience.

The significant divergences between Aurobindo's political idealism and the political thought of European idealism arise

[1]The word ethical would signify not the inward morality of individual conscience and subjective moral virtue, but has reference to social ethics or *Sittlichkeit*.

from the differences in their respective philosophical and political background. German idealism marked a reaction against eighteenth century naturalism, materialism and scepticism. Its basic problem was to find the justification of a strong unified state against the disintegrating tendencies of German social, economic and political institutions. Oxford Idealism partly marked a reaction against the British empirical traditions and the dominant economic individualism of the Benthamites. It was an attempt to transplant Plato, Aristotle, Kant and Hegel in the political soil of England. Aurobindo was reacting against the dominance of Vedantic illusionism, Buddhist idealism and Madhyamika nihlism and his problem was to emphasize the positive aspects of the Vedanta as a gospel of life and world-fulfilment. Besides being a Yogi and a mystic seer he has constructed a political philosophy on the basis of the insight of the Vedanta and some kindred patterns in Western thought. But his hostility to the state is fundamental[1] because the state to his mind connotes the concentration of physical power, and its relentless pursuit of gains, spoils and victories repels his sensitive soul. He can never conceive of the state as a divine moment on earth or as a realized moral substance. He would like to use the state for the embodiment of specific social, economic and political objectives, but to invest it with a moral and spiritual personality appears to him to deify the too lustful titan who has to be cautiously used and not reverentially worshipped.

The comparative study of modern Western political idealism and Aurobindo's philosophy of the state indicates that it is possible for me to accept the rationality of the state without conceiving it as realized ethical substance. Aurobindo is significant because he exalts the moral and spiritual worth of the individual. European idealism is significant because it teaches that the state is an instrument of reason. One of the most baneful influences in Indian history has been the tendency towards political disintegration. In India today we need a strong state because without the state we can neither safeguard our freedom nor can we rationalize our social and economic life. But we

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 19: "The falsehood lies in the underlying idea that the state is something greater than the individuals constituting it...."

have also to guard against power politics and the trend towards omnicompetence of the state which accompany the assertion of the significance of the state. The greatest problem today in India is to achieve an integral political philosophy which can recognize the Vedantic-Buddhistic-Kantian-Aurobindian moral and spiritual worth of the individual, and can at the same time justify the legitimate use of the minimum necessary political power as advocated by Green and Bosanquet.[1]

3. ANARCHISM

Perhaps the point which further dramatizes the difference between Aurobindo and the Western school of political idealism is that the former has significant anarchist elements in his thought. Hegel, Green and Bosanquet never entertain any anarchistic feature in their political philosophy, whereas Aurobindo is happy at the prospect of a spiritualized anarchism. As a philosophy of protest against the omnicompetence of the coercive mechanisms of power, anarchism is an old tradition in the West and can be traced to Zeno, the founder of Stoic philosophy. The cardinal point in modern anarchism has been an emphasis on justice and moral freedom. Anarchism condemns the mechanization, exaggerated regimentation and authoritarianism of the modern state. In the place of constraint, anarchism stresses voluntary and spontaneous cooperation.[2] Anarchism regards the state as an engine of exploitation and it has received substantial support in its condemnation of the state from the Marxian theory that the state is the registering machine for the dictates of the exploiting classes. Anarchism believes in the fundamental goodness of human nature which, however, may be corrupted by association with the coercive state and its institutions. It advocates a moral and even a political revolution to destroy the state. There were several important anarchists in nineteenth century Europe. Max Stirner advocated the substitution of the state by an "association

[1] For constructive suggestions for such a political philosophy see V.P. Varma, *Rajniti Aur Darshana* (In Hindi. Patna, 1956).

[2] According to Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, p. 66, idealistic (or philosophical) anarchism is the old individualism of the ideal reason carried to its logical conclusion.

of egoists". According to him society was a fiction and individual personality was the sole significant unit. But whereas Stirner was an individualist anarchist, Michael Bakunin was a collectivist anarchist.[1] He introduced the cult of terrorism into the anarchist movement, and like Ludwig Feuerbach and Marx, considered God and religion to be anti-social forces of superstition. Peter Kropotkin wanted a form of society dominated by communes. Even in Marxism there is an anarchist element to the extent that the Marxist also accepts a voluntary automatic withering away of the state after the end of class exploitation.[2] But more than the ideas of any other thinker, the religious anarchism of Leo Tolstoy has been the greatest inspiration to Indian anarchists. There is no trace of any direct influence of Tolstoy on Aurobindo. Tilak, in his articles in the *Kesari* in May 1908, and in his trial speech of July 1908, refers to the activities of the Russian nihilists. The profound influence of Tolstoy on Gandhi is also universally recognized.

(*a*) *Vitalistic Anarchism*

Aurobindo distinguishes between three schools of anarchism.[3] The vitalistic or violent form of anarchism deliberately protests against any formal principle of organization and claims the right of man to "live his own life". Aurobindo is opposed to this form of anarchism. Perhaps we could regard Benjamin Tucker as an illustration of vitalistic anarchism. According to Tucker "anarchists are egoists in the farthest and fullest sense". They totally discard "the idea of moral obligation". Tucker says that all men have "the right, if they have the power, to kill or coerce other men and make the entire world subservient to their needs".[4] Aurobindo recognizes the great services rendered by social regulation and organization in the evolution

[1] Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, p. 271: "The severest school of anarchism rejects all compromise with communism."

[2] According to Marxism the bourgeois state is *destroyed* and the proletarian state *withers away*. V.I. Lenin, *State and Revolution* (New York, International Publishers, 1932), pp. 17-20.

[3] *The Human Cycle*, p. 268.

[4] Benjamin Tucker, *Instead of a Book, by a Man Too Busy to Write One: a Fragmentary Exposition of Philosophical Anarchism* (New York, 1897). Quoted in F.W. Coker, *Recent Political Thought* (New York, 1934), pp. 198-9.

of man. The infra-rational and socially destructive tendencies and impulses of men cannot be voluntarily checked but have to be regulated by an external legal system. The imposition of a coercive authority is, therefore, inevitable in the early stages of society. The violent or vitalistic school of anarchism is mistaken in prematurely attacking the concept of authority.

Aurobindo thinks it possible, however, to transcend the stage of external legal imposition of authority. As a spiritualist, he believes it to be possible that the external legal and political mechanism may be replaced by an inner law and a code of self-imposed obligations. Aurobindo says: "And the perfect social state must be one in which governmental compulsion is abolished and man is able to live with his fellowmen by free agreement and cooperation."[1]

(*b*) *Intellectual or Philosophical Anarchism*

Intellectual anarchism, according to Aurobindo, has two psychological foundations.[2] First, it recognizes that the human mind which claims liberty for itself will be ready to guarantee the right of others to an equal amount of freedom. Secondly, it emphasizes the existence of a natural sympathy and fellow-feeling in man and regards it possible to construct a social and political system founded on freedom, equality and spontaneous co-operation on the basis of this altruistic psychological sub-structure. Intellectual or philosophical anarchism operates with a higher and nobler concept of the nature of man than vitalistic or violent anarchism. Aurobindo says: "But there is a higher, an intellectual anarchist thought which in its aim and formula recovers and carries to its furthest logical conclusions a very real truth of nature and of the divine in man. In its revolt against the opposite exaggeration of the social principle, we find it declaring that all government of man by man by the power of compulsion is an evil, a violation, a suppression or a deformation of a natural principle of good which would otherwise grow and prevail for the perfection of the human race. Even the social principle in itself is questioned and held liable

[1] *The Human Cycle*, pp. 268-9.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 270-1.

for a sort of fall in man from a natural to an unnatural and artifical principle of living."[1] But Aurobindo thinks that even intellectual anarchism cannot solve the problems of man, because reason which is the basis of this theory is only an intermediate and not the highest power in nature's evolution. Hence a source of authority higher than reason — the soul of man — has to be resorted to. The European ideal of an intellectual anarchism has to be replaced by the theory of spiritual or spiritualized anarchism. He interprets the ancient Indian ideal of a golden age, *Satyayuga*, also to postulate a free spiritual anarchism.[2]

(c) *Spiritual Anarchism : Tolstoy, Gandhi and Aurobindo*

Aurobindo is definitely hostile to the vitalistic or violent form of anarchism. He is partly favourable to the second or the philosophical school of anarchism. But he would like to go beyond even philosophical or intellectual anarchism. As far as his own ideas are concerned, at an ultimate level he wants the realization of the vision of a spiritual society. He wants that the spiritual sources of inner governance should become the guide for human existence. But although Aurobindo is favourable to a spiritual anarchism he will not agree with some of the extreme views of the spiritual anarchists. He states: "As it expresses itself at the present day, there is much in it that is exaggerated and imperfect. Its seers seem often to preach an impossible self-abnegation of the vital life and an asceticism which instead of purifying and transforming the vital being, seeks to suppress and even kill it, life itself is impoverished or dried up by this severe austerity in its very springs. Carried away by a high-reaching spirit of revolt, these prophets denounce civilization as a failure because of its vitalistic exaggerations, but set up an opposite exaggeration which might well cure civilisation of some of its crying faults and ugliness, but would deprive it also of many real and valuable gains."[3] It is highly probable that these criticisms of Aurobindo, directed

[1] *The Human Cycle*, p. 268.
[2] Sri Aurobindo, *The Renaissance in India*, pp. 22-3. Also *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 16.
[3] *The Human Cycle*, pp. 272-3.

against some of the prophets of a spiritual anarchism, refer to Leo Tolstoy and Gandhi.

Tolstoy considered the state to be a product of egoism and force and hence opposed to the spirit of the Bible.[1] Except for his opposition to physical force and to coercive communism in all its forms, Tolstoy accepted the main ideas of anarchism. He wanted a return to the spiritual and moral spirit of early Christianity, and waged a struggle against the organized Church. He was relentless in his opposition to modern civilization which is based upon commerce, economics and natural science. He advocated non-cooperation with the state and its administrative and legal mechanisms and even preached a refusal to pay taxes. Some of these practical features of Tolstoyan anarchism have some resemblance to the doctrine of passive resistance preached by Aurobindo during the years he was active as a nationalist leader. Tolstoy thought that a return to the old spirit of the gospels could lead to a regeneration of humanity. But while in Tolstoy the predominant emphasis is on a moral and religious renaissance, Aurobindo insists upon a discovery of the subliminal and cosmic powers of the human soul. If Tolstoy the great litterateur and crusader was satisfied with a moral and religious solution of the problems of man, the Yogi and the sage Aurobindo would insist upon a transformation of human consciousness.

Gandhi considers the state to be a soulless machine which, because of its origin in violence, cannot be expected to renounce force. According to him "true democracy or the Swaraj of the masses can never come through untruthful and violent means, for the simple reason that the natural corollary to their use would be to remove all opposition through the suppression or extermination of the antagonists".[2] The state represents the concentration of force. Individual freedom can be realized only "under a regime of unadulterated Ahimsa".[3] The ideal state would do away with all forms of coercion. It will be Ramrajya or sovereignity of the people based on pure moral authority.[4] "In such a state every one is his own ruler. He rules himself

[1] Leo Tolstoy, *What Must We Do Then*; *Confessions*; *The Kingdpm of God Is Within You*; *The Gospel in Brief*.
[2] *Harijan*, May 27, 1939.
[3] *Ibid.* [4] *Harijan*, Jan. 2, 1937.

in such a manner that he is never a hindrance to his neighbour. In the ideal state, therefore, there is no political power because there is no state."[1]

But while the Gandhian ideal tends to glorify a simple unsophisticated condition akin to nature, Aurobindo would not stand for doing away with the benefits of modern industrial civilization. The hostility to the industrial and mechanical civilization of the West is far stronger in Gandhi than in Aurobindo. While Gandhi emphasizes the ethical ultimates of truth and non-violence, in Aurobindo the emphasis is more on spiritual transformation. Both Gandhi and Aurobindo, however, agree that the ideal state should be pacific.[2] To this extent their idea is totally different from that of the supreme champion of philosophical rulership, Plato, who recognizes the possibilities of war even in the best state ruled by the philosophers. Plato who was loyal to the traditions of the Greek *polis* could never conceive of the total elimination of political constraint. Aurobindo thinks that some of the advocates of spiritual anarchism lay great emphasis on asceticism and self-abnegation.[3] We do find a dominant austere trend both in the teachings of Tolostoy and Gandhi. Aurobindo believes that the prime condition for a better future is to bring to the surface the hidden powers of the spirit. He wants the motive-force for the ideal society to be a sense of spiritual comradeship, which means the realization of an inner union. Only thus can egoism disappear and the perfection both of the individual and of the society be attained. The spiritual anarchism as visualized by Aurobindo would be realized in a perfectly spiritualized society. Only then will all men be free, and each man will manifest the adherence to a superior divine law.

Aurobindo thinks that even if the attainment of the ideal spiritual or spiritualized anarchism may appear to be a distant and far off consummation, perhaps the realization of the ideal of philosophic anarchism may not be so remote. Humanity today is involved in a tussle between the ideal of liberty and

[1] *Young India*, July 2, 1931, p. 162.

[2] Although Aurobindo never has been an advocate of the absolute concept of Ahimsa, still he has held that the advent of the gnostic society will amount to the absolute elimination of the vitalistic malady of war.

[3] *The Human Cycle* (American edition), p. 245.

the ideal of regimentation. It is possible that the socialistic period might be "followed by another more inspired by the principles of philosophic anarchism, that is to say, of unity based upon the completest individual freedom and freedom also of natural unforced grouping".[1] Philosophical or intellectual anarchism is, however, not the aim of Aurobindo. He would plead for the final realization of the essence of spiritualized anarchism in a spiritualized society.[2]

Anarchism as a political philosophy had never any serious appeal in any country of the world, except Russia for a short while. It has seemed to run counter to the fundamental social experience of humanity that without the organization of constraint in a definable social structure human evolution cannot proceed. If the existing state is deliberately destroyed by resort to violent means, it would generate another coercive state, because the organizers of violence would form a state to consolidate their own power. Gandhi seems perfectly correct in his views that the preaching of violent, coercive and even immoral means and methods would generate further violence and coercion and hatred. Nicolas Berdyaev considers anarchism to be an aspect of the decline of the Renaissance spirit.[3] It has its origins in feelings of hatred and revenge against an exploitationist society. Both Aurobindo and Berdyaev do not want anarchism harmfully to affect the benefits of civilization and culture. Aurobindo thinks that the principal defect of anarchist political philosophy is that it contemplates the elimination of the state before the deep social force of human brotherhood has become a realized social category.[4] If the coercive mechanism is replaced before this consummation has been reached, it would lead to the resurgence of the law of the beasts. Gandhi and Aurobindo therefore differ from Stirner and Bakunin in laying primary emphasis not on the replacement or the des-

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 169.

[2] *The Human Cycle*, p. 272: "A spiritual or spiritualized anarchism might appear to come nearer to the real solution or at least touch something of it from afar . . . . But apart from these excesses of a too logical thought and a one-sided impulsion, apart from the inability of any 'ism' to express the truth of the spirit which exceeds all such compartments, we seem here to be near to the real way out, to the discovery of the saving motive-force."

[3] N. Berdyaev, *The Meaning of History*, pp. 171-2.

[4] *Dharma Aur Jatiyata* (in Hindi), pp. 122-3.

truction of the coercive state but on the positive cultivation of moral and spiritual sentiments. Anarchism may appear to be an impossible political ideal but it has challenged the foundations of the centralized state and has given some impetus to movements of decentralization, local autonomy, regionalism; to that extent its positive contributions have to be accepted by students of political science.

The central theme of Aurobindo's political philosophy, however, is not to inculcate spiritual anarchism. His main emphasis is on the spiritualization of human life. His aim is not to launch a crusade against the present mechanisms and organs of social and political order, which is the all-pervasive note in anarchism, of whatsoever a school it may be. His aim is to enunciate the progressive incorporation of the spiritual element in collective life. Hence although there is fundamental similarity between the theories of spiritual anarchism and the ideal of spiritualized society as conceived by Aurobindo, in that both are marked by the elimination of the agencies of coercion, the principal concept in Aurobindo's political thought is not spiritual anarchism but the divinization of individual and collective life.

4. DEMOCRACY

(a) *Foundations of Democracy*

Being a convinced believer in the consummation of a spiritualized society as the only political solution for human problems, Aurobindo is necessarily critical of modern institutional devices like socialism and democracy to solve the problems of society and politics. He does acknowledge, however, that both democracy and socialism are products of the self-conscious evolution of society because they are partly based on the methodology of reason and attempt a rational planning of political, social and natural resources. In the process of its evolution from an infra-rational, instinctive natural stage, society attempts to "perfect consciously by means of the state the whole organisation of its life, military, political, administrative, economic, social, cultural. The completeness of the process depends on the completeness of the development by

which the state and society become, as far as that may be, synonimous. That is the importance of democracy; that is the importance also of socialism. They are the sign that the society is getting ready to be an entirely self-conscious and therefore a freely and consciously self-regulating organism."[1] The infra-rational forces have, compared to the semi-rational social organizations, less dominance under democracy and socialism because there is an attempt to do things by calculation and planning. Both democracy and socialism have faith in the power of science to lay the foundations of a happier world. But Aurobindo does not think that the institutionalized patterns of modern democracy and socialism represent the highest consummation of social rationality. They are "only a first crude and bungling attempt at that consummation, an efficient hint and not a freely intelligent realisation".[2]

As a political form, democracy has been advocated and criticized since the times of Herodotus and Plato. Different arguments have been advanced to support it. According to Aristotle, democracy is based on liberty and equality. Seventeenth century writers in England referred to the natural rights of people to life, liberty and property. It has been argued that the democratic form of government enables the people to give concrete expression to their political personality; the realization of the political self is a moral gain to the people and to the community. At times the pragmatic and utilitarian argument is advanced that the people concerned can best manage their political system themselves. They know their problems and hence the vast number of citizens who are immediately affected by the governmental mechanism should control the governmental processes themselves. Some writers refer to the success of democracy in bringing to the political scene the hitherto ungalvanized initiative and resourcefulness of the masses, who learn to transcend local and egoistic interests by participation in the nation's political process.

According to Aurobindo there are two foundational principles of individualistic democracy.[3] First, all individuals are to have equal political say, not because their actual equality is

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 211.
[2] *Ibid.* [3] *The Human Cycle*, p. 243.

empirically demonstrable but because otherwise there would be the dominance of a socially and economically powerful segment in society. Secondly, it is morally sound that as long as an individual does not encroach upon the rights of others he should be allowed "to govern his life according to the dictates of his own reason."[1]

Democracy believes that mass education and political freedom can solve most of the problems that confront man. Its institutionalization has certainly added to the stature of the common man and for the first time in history the people are "erect, active and alive, and where there is life, there is always a hope of better things."[2] The people have been called to exercise their political choice in the democratic countries and this, in spite of the subterranean forces of wealth and propaganda which influence the actual exercise of the choice, is a great ethical gain. Aristotle has correctly pointed out that the true stage of ethical responsibility only begins when there is freedom of choice. Democracy has definitely made some laudable attempts in generalizing opportunities for choice in the political context. It has understood the value of educating those whom Disraeli characterized as "our masters". In spite of the restricted opportunities for education and the limitations on the active exercise of political intelligence "there is a much greater equalisation [of educational and other opportunities] than was at all possible in former states of society".[3]

Aurobindo distinguishes the mentality and political orientations of the aristocratic and monarchical states from democracies[4] "which are bourgeois states in the form either of a constitutional monarchy or a middle-class republic."[5] The former are political in their cast and set-up and are basically interested in territorial and political gains and are only secondarily concerned with commercial advantages. The bourgeois democratic states, on the other hand, are interested principally in the commercial field and want colonies for the supply of raw materials and for providing markets for their manufactured goods. They are chiefly concerned with the maximization of wealth; politi-

[1] *The Human Cycle*, p. 243.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 246-7. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 247.
[4] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 253-4. [5] *Ibid.*, p. 253.

cal aggrandizement is regarded only as a means to that. The monarchical or aristocratic states resort to war almost as a first expedient. We find several examples of this phenomenon in ancient history and in modern times also. The bourgeois democratic states, on the other hand, extend the techniques of calculation and bargaining which they use in economic dealings, also to the political and diplomatic field. They resort to war as the last expedient. They would prefer demonstration of force to actual resort to force. Nevertheless, it is equally true that due to the growth of industrial technology the bourgeois democratic states have built a colossal war machine, the like of which could not even be dreamt of by the ancient or medieval or even the early modern monarchical or aristocratic states.

Democracy is interpreted in two ways. First, it signifies a political institutional mechanism through which the citizens of a country can register their political will on basic social and political issues. This is an interpretation of democracy in the purely political sense. Secondly, democracy is regarded as a philosophy of life denoting a humane and equalitarian orientation. Aurobindo considers the democratic political form to be a contribution of Western civilization. On the other hand he does recognize that in the East there were some "purely social democracies."[1] Aurobindo seems historically correct in his statement that the democratic mechanism is a contribution of the Western peoples. We have some examples of republics in ancient India but not of democracy; at best we had aristocratic republics.[2] In the Eastern civilizations no regular institutional mechanism could be devised for the people to express their political views. On the other hand, there were in the Eastern civilizations social and economic associations functioning at a local level through which some participation of the people in the agencies of social control and cultural life was

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 239.

[2] Aurobindo does not seem to be correct in his statement, (*The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 238), that "the republican tendency is indeed Western in its origin". In modern political science there is a distinction made between the republican and the democratic forms of government. A republic only signifies kinglessness. Democracy stresses the participation of the people in the fundamental governmental process. In ancient Athens there was democracy. In ancient Rome there was a republic. In ancient India there are important references to *Gana* and *Sangha*. They signified republican politics. But I think that political democracy is an importation from the West.

made possible. In the ancient scriptures of India and in the teachings of the medieval Hindu saints we find references to a philosophical and even social equality of man. But from the philosophy of spiritual monism, urging the unity of existence and the oneness of all beings, the political implication of equal distribution of power was not drawn in Indian thought and literature. From the Vedic days onwards, though we find metaphysical notions of the equality of all living beings, and the preaching of love and kindness to all, we have never any reference to any indigenous theory or practice of political democracy. The present democratic upsurge in India has been generated by the impact of Western civilization.

Aurobindo analyzes the principal political ideas behind Greek democracy. He thinks that an effective share in the governmental process by each citizen and a great freedom of individual action and temperament were the two main ideas behind Greek democracy.[1] According to Aristotle the democratic form is characterized by *Eleutheria* (liberty). *Eleutheria* postulates the political principle that all citizens should rule and be ruled in turn, otherwise instead of the political concept of the equality of citizens the sentiments of superiority and subordination characterizing the master-slave relationships would begin to operate. *Eleutheria* also postulates the sociological principle that a man should live as he likes. According to Aurobindo a certain democratic equality is inevitable in a small community.[2] The phenomena of strongly entrenched class stratifications and sectional rule do occasionally characterize the military period of the history of a clan or tribe, but in a small territorial organization they cannot be perpetuated except by recourse to artificial segregations of the people or by the employment of authoritarian techniques, as was done by Sparta and Venice. A small community generates close and intimate feelings of social bonds and these act as deterrents against the growth of a mechanical social hierarchy. "In Athens the tanner Cleon and the high-born Nicias exercised equal influence."[3] The difference between the ancient "pure" democracies of the Greek world and the modern democratic

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 291.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 101. [3] *Ibid.*

constitutions, seeking to elicit and register the consent of the governed not only through general elections but in several countries through other devices like initiative, referendum, recall, plebiscites etc, is indeed very great. The territorial difference is in some cases tremendous and one has only to look at the size of Athens and that of the U.S.A. to recognize the dissimilarity. The tendency to democratic freedom, according to Aurobindo, was "inborn in the spirit and inherent in the form of the city state".[1] The Greek democracies were based, however, on a very strong racial prejudice—an invincible belief in the superiority of the Hellenes to the barbarians. But modern democratic philosophy, in spite of the questionable practices of several democratic countries, is based on the idea of the equality of man.

According to Aurobindo, democracy, socialism and pacifism are to a great extent the by-products of, or at least vitally inspired by, the inward presence of the idea of humanism.[2] Democracy, because of its concepts of equality and humanity, had a tremendous appeal for the European peoples. It is true that the imperial ascendancy of Napoleon and the return of the Bourbons to the French throne in 1815 meant an attack on the principle of liberty proclaimed by the theorists of the French Revolution. Metternich tried to stifle the new tide of nationalism and democracy, and the Holy Alliance and the Quadruple Alliance (of Austria, Prussia, Russia and England) were formed against the rising tide of new political forces. Aurobindo thinks that the Metternich system failed because of "the violent resurgence of oppressed democracy in 1848."[3] Since that time democracy had been developing progressively until the end of the First World War. After 1920 there was a rise of dictatorships in several countries, proving the truth in the prophecy of the French and Spanish conservatives like De Maistre and Donoso Cortez, and the "Prussian Socialist" Spengler, that democracy would be supplanted by dictatorships or Caesarism. Commenting on the situation which developed after the Treaty of Versailles, Aurobindo prophesied an "inevitable future duel between the young Titan, socialism, and the old Olympian

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 100.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 362. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 252.

gods of a bourgeois-democratic world".[1] This prophecy of Aurobindo has a remarkable similarity to Lenin's statement in 1920.

(*b*) *Critique of Democracy*

Democracy has been linked to the philosophies of economic and political individualism. Economic individualism accepts the dynamic motivating force of self-interest, whose pursuit by all is supposed to lead to the crystallization of common interest through the automatic operation of the market mechanism, as stated by Ricardo, or by the working of the invisible hand of God, as conceived by Smith who believed in Leibnitz's theory of pre-established harmony. Political individualism accepts that government should be based on the consent of the governed and should try to safeguard the rights and interests of the individual.

Aurobindo thinks there have been four consequences of the individualistic democratic ideal in practice.[2] First, although the concept of equality has been loudly preached, in actual practice a dominant class has obtained social and political leadership in the name of democracy. But since the ideals of liberty and equality have too powerful an appeal to be permanently stifled, the second consequence of individualistic democracy has been an increasing effort on the part of the exploited and the under-privileged to assert their rights. There is the possibility of a "war of classes" if the exploited sections persist in their attempt to turn the "pseudo-democractic falsehood into real democratic truth".[3] Thirdly, there is a perpetual strife of parties as a logical result of this class struggle. This party struggle, although simple at first and capable of easy solution, later on develops into "an impotent and sterilising chaos of names, labels, programmes, war-cries".[4] Behind the external professions of ethical and sentimental idealism one can detect a struggle of powerfully entrenched conflicting interests for maintaining their supremacy. Fourthly, there is a growing "stress of competition which

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 252.
[2] *The Human Cycle*, p. 245.
[3] *Ibid.* [4] *Ibid.*

replaces the ordered tyrannies of the infra-rational periods of humanity by a sort of ordered conflict. And this conflict ends in the survival not of the spiritually, rationally or physically fittest, but of the most fortunate and vitally successful."[1] The unending conflict of competing groups and interests leads to the absorption of human energies in socially unproductive tasks and enterprises, and hence the perfect equality of educational and other opportunities which democracy loudly professes to foster does not become a reality.[2]

The democratic ideology, in spite of several solid achievements, has been subjected to various criticisms. Plato, Marx and Pareto have been its trenchant critics. Aurobindo criticizes democracy on various grounds. First, the "mass consciousness by itself moves by a vague, half-formed or unformed subliminal and commonly subconscient impulse rising to the surface; it is prone to a blind or half-seeing unanimity which suppresses the individual in the common movement: if it thinks, it is by the motto, the slogan, the watch-word, the common crude or formed idea, the traditional, the accepted customary notion; it acts, when not by instinct or on impulse, then by the rule of the pack, the herd mentality, the type law".[3] He does not want that the mass mind, which shows a predominance of dark unregenerate forces, should be entrusted with the functions of government which require emotional discipline and a rational detachment. Therefore he is opposed to the governance of the "democratic cultus of the average man".[4] This criticism of democracy, that it leads to the dominance of the mediocre, is the main burden of the aristocratic attack on democracy.[5] De Tocqueville, Laveleye, Bluntschli and Henry Main are agreed that, being the rule of the average and the mediocre, the mob or the mass, democracy is antithetical to culture and is unfavourable to the growth and development of art, literature and science.

Aurobindo's second criticism against democracy is that virtually it amounts not to the government of the people by and for the people, but to the rule of the bourgeoise and the ascen-

[1] *The Human Cycle*, p. 245. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 247.
[3] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 487. [4] *Ibid.*, p. 928.
[5] Cf. The arguments of George Santayana, Irving Babbit, and Paul Elmer More.

dancy of the plutocratic sections.[1] He thinks that perfect and real democracy exists nowhere in the world and "everywhere the propertied and professional classes and the bourgeoisie [have] governed in the name of the people."[2] Hence the ideal of a harmonious, ordered and rationalized society, as put forward by the age of individualism, has not been realized and instead "there has been organised a huge competitive system, a frantically rapid and one-sided development of industrialism and under the garb of democracy, an increasing plutocratic tendency that shocks by its ostentatious grossness and the magnititude of its gulfs and distances."[3] The plutocratic tendencies of modern democracies which Aurobindo condemns have been analyzed and challenged also by Marx, Pareto and Spengler. For Marx the state is the political form of an exploitationist society and democracy is the institutional mechanism devised by the bourgeoisie to legalize its exploitation of the vast masses, and especially of the proletariat. The slogans of natural right and justice and equality of all have been raised by the bourgeoisie to safeguard its own right. But when faced with a popular demand for the enforcement of those same rights, it refuses to comply.[4] Marx and Engels bitterly criticize the role of wealth in American politics.[5] Pareto refers to the increasing growth of the plutocratic tendency in European politics since the sixties and the seventies of the last century, and makes an attempt to substantiate his thesis historically. According to Spengler, democracy is corrupted by the force of money. He considers the growth of money-politics to be an important political trend of the period of the decline of culture and transition to a megalopolitan civilization.[6] Several monographs on the actual operation of democracy have revealed the vast influence of wealth in the formation of political decisions; the dynamics of pressure groups, organized interests or the financial empires of predominant families in modern democracies remind one of the an-

[1] Aurobindo, *The Renaissance in India*, p. 41, is critical of "the middle-class pseudo-democracy of nineteenth century England".
[2] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 152.
[3] *The Human Cycle*, p. 248.
[4] Karl Marx, "The Civil War in France", *Selected Works*, vol. II, p. 518.
[5] F. Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (New York, 1942), p. 157.
[6] O. Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, vol. II, p. 465, pp. 469-96.

cient oligarchies of Greece and Rome.[1] Hence there is truth in Aurobindo's criticism of the plutocratization of democracy.

Aurobindo states that behind the democratic structure the really active force is a powerful minority. The trend towards the growth of an elite is the third point in Aurobindo's critique of democracy. Whatever the external form, real governance is by a small group. He says: "... the society has no discoverable common reason and will belonging alike to all its members; for the group-soul rather works out its tendencies by a diversity of opinions, a diversity of wills, a diversity of life, and the vitality of the group-life depends largely upon the working of this diversity, its continuity, its richness. Since that is so, government by the organised state must mean always government by a number of individuals — whether that number be in theory the minority or the majority makes in the end little fundamental difference. For even when it is the majority that nominally governs, it is in fact always the reason and will of a comparatively few effective men — and not really any common reason and will of all — that rules and regulates things with the consent of the half-hypnotised mass."[2]

This generalization of Aurobindo, that behind the external forms of a democratic organization theoretically accepting mass participation in politics the real political nerve-centre is controlled by a strong and powerful minority, can be substantiated by the studies of other writers on Western democracy. Pareto and Mosca, on the basis of Greek and modern history, formulated the sociological theory of the ruling class.[3] According to Mosca, whatever be the political form — a monarchy, an aristocracy or a democracy — there are always a few people at the top who control the political fabric.[4] Roberto Michels analyzed the working of the oligarchical tendency in the Italian trade unions.[5] Toynbee states that the great new forces of democracy and industrialism which have been evolved by a small creative minority have not yet touched the great masses of huma-

[1] A.F. Bentley, *The Process of Government*; Harold F. Gosnell, *Democracy*; Harold J. Laski, *The American Democracy*; V.O. Key, *Politics, Parties and Pressure Groups*.

[2] *The Human Cycle*, p. 261.

[3] Vilfredo Pareto, "The Social Equilibrium in History", *Mind and Society*, vol. IV, pp. 1740-1912.

[4] Gaetano Mosca, *The Ruling Class* (New York, 1939), pp. 49-69.

[5] Roberto Michels, *Political Parties* (New York, 1915).

nity, who live almost at the same moral and intellectual level as before the rise of these great ideologies. It is difficult to deny the corrosive forces which have corrupted modern democracy. The force of plutocracy can be easily eliminated because a socialization of wealth can do away with plutocracy. But the social force of 'the elite' is difficult to eradicate because it seems to emerge from the psychological incapacity of people to be their own effective political rulers. Active citizenship and creative political participation seem difficult endeavours and it appears that for a long time to come one has to accept the existence of an elite as an inevitable phenomenon.

But to the credit of democracy, it has to be asserted that its existence has made the considerable difference between the historically existent and legally recognized despotism and class rule, as for example in Romanoff Russia and Bourbon France, on the one hand, and at least the maintenance of some political institutions which register the political decision of the electorate on vital issues, at periodic intervals, on the other. There may be defects in the workings of the democratic devices of representation, election and decentralization but the very existence of these mechanisms does produce great influence in the long run. Hence the phenomenal difference between the older absolutism and modern democracy has to be recognized. Furthermore, a moderate amount of criticism regarding the techniques and tactics of political control resorted to by the elite, has also now been made possible. This increasing social awareness may become the prelude to its eventual elimination.

Fourthly, Aurobindo is also critical of the mechanism of modern representative democracy.[1] Rousseau was fanatically opposed to representation. Hegel advocated the representation not of individuals but of significant social and economic circles. The Fascists advocated the idea of 'creative representation'. The structure of the Fascist state in Italy was based on the representation of corporations. Even among the supporters of the representative system we find that some have propounded various schemes of minority representation, and some, for example, the Guild Socialists, want the substitution of territorial representation by functional representation. Aurobindo's criticism amounts to the

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 291-2.

statement of the empirical fact that the legislators do not really represent the electorate. He says: "In large states, the personal share of each citizen in the government cannot be effective; he can only have an equal share — illusory for the individual although effective in the mass — in the periodical choice of his legislators and administrators. Even if these have not practically to be elected from a class which is not the whole or even the majority of the community, at present almost everywhere the middle class, still these legislators and administrators do not really represent their electors. The power they represent is another, a formless and bodiless entity, which has taken the place of monarch and aristocracy, that impersonal group-being which assumes some sort of outward form and body and conscious action in the huge mechanism of the modern state. Against this power the individual is much more helpless than he was against old oppressions."[1] Aurobindo is justified in pointing out the growing insignificance of the individual in the complex mechanism of the modern industrial society and bureaucratic administrative order. The rugged individualism of the old eighteenth century is not possible today. The individual today is only a mechanical part in a vast powerful 'leviathan' and his life lies at the mercy of forces almost imponderable and incalculable for him. In a sense, his freedom of will and autonomy of decision have been replaced by the dominance of political and economic necessity. Aurobindo's concept of the impersonal group-being may at first appear metaphysical and not amenable to concrete grasp. But it seems that he is only referring to the vast proliferation of the modern industrial and political system resulting in the growth of multiple powerful groups and associations. Most often these groups do not represent the opinion of the ordinary members, and are dominated by a few powerful and influential members. What we get is an oligarchy or dictatorship of a few individuals. The power of wealth, leading to the monopolization of the means of communication such as the press and the radio by the moneyed groups, has reduced the old Lockean-Jeffersonian vision of a government based on the consent of the governed to a more or less unrealizable utopia. Consent pre-supposes

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 291-2.

rational deliberation and autonomy of decision, and they are not possible in a real and genuine sense today when the governmental process has become complicated and difficult, and when technical, economic and military questions, which are either beyond comprehension for the ordinary citizen or which necessitate a great amount of secrecy on the part of the top administrators on grounds of national security, are involved.

Because the democratic system suffers from several defects, Aurobindo is sceptical about its being the guarantee of liberty.[1] It is true that in some of the highly advanced democratic countries democracy has protected the people from the recrudescence of brutal and violent forms of tyranny as found in older times. But in others "we see today the democratic form of government march steadily towards such an organised annihilation of individual liberty as could not have been dreamed of in the old aristocratic and monarchical systems".[2]

Certainly Aurobindo is correct in emphasizing the danger to liberty from democratic majority rule. He says: "But there is a deprivation of liberty which is more respectable in appearance, more subtle and systematised, more mild in its method because it has a greater force at its back, but for that very reason more effective and pervading. The tyranny of the majority has become a familiar phrase and its deadening effects have been depicted with a great force of resentment by a few of the modern intellectuals; but what the future promises us is something more formidable still, the tyranny of the whole, of the self-hypnotised mass over its constituent groups and units."[3] Locke apprehended some possible dangers to the minority from the side of the majority, in a parliamentary constitutional government based on the supremacy of the majority. Rousseau also saw the dangers of majority rule and refused to identify the general will oriented towards common good with the numerical summation of the will of all. We find the idea that majority rule may be antithetical to liberty also in Kant and Gandhi. Kant wrote: "The 'whole people' so-called who carry the measures are really not all, but only a majority: so that here the individual will is in contradiction

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 291-2.
[2] *Ibid.* [3] *Ibid.*

with itself and with the principle of freedom." Gandhi challenged the Western idea of democracy.[1] He formulated his vision of Ramrajya, the "true democracy".[2] He wrote: "Western democracy is on its trial. If it has already proved a failure, may it be reserved for India to evolve the true science of democracy by giving a visible representation of its buttress. Corruption and hypocrisy ought not to be the inevitable products of democracy, as they undoubtedly are today. Nor is bulk the true test of democracy. True democracy is not inconsistent with a few persons representing the spirit, the hope and aspirations of those whom they claim to represent." Aurobindo is justified in hinting at the danger to liberty involved in the idea of majority rule.

Aurobindo also refers to the chances of mass hypnotism and fury leading to the suppression of the intermediate associations and groups. But from the examples of modern history we find that the concept of *Gleichshaltung* or co-ordination by the state has been resorted to only in totalitarian countries and it is possible to hope that the growth of the democratic mechanism may foster the growth of groups. It is being increasingly realized that the growth of associations and groups is an adjunct of, and not a hindrance to, democracy. Aurobindo is a strong advocate of the revival and revitalization of group life and he would definitely refuse to adhere to Rousseau's conception that the growth of intermediate associations interposes particular wills and raises impediments in the path of the concretization of the general will. Aurobindo's warning that the centralizing tendencies of modern democracy may cramp the creative healthy growth of organic groups and associations is well timed.

As a political philosophy democracy advocates the techniques of compromise, persuasion, negotiation, bargaining and concessions; it cannot satisfy the fanatic of any cult. It will not satisfy the anarchist who revolts against the least idea of governmental and social constraint. On the other hand socialists and communists are critical of the merely formal political

[1] V.P. Varma, *Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi and Sarvodaya* (Agra, L. N. Agrawal, 1959), pp. 187-197.
[2] *Young India*, May 28, 1931.

equality advocated by democracy. In the absence of a substantial economic equality they think that formal political equality is an illusion and cannot check the dominating influence of large income groups in politics. Some Western democracies have been imperialistic abroad, and therefore Asiatic and African nationalists have been critical of democracy. Some sociologists have pointed out that the purusit of imperialism abroad is bound to generate in the ruling sections arrogant anti-social attitudes and a bureaucratic mentality which are antithetical to the growth of democracy, because after their return to the home country these rulers would wish to follow a similar policy at home. Aurobindo has in view these critics of democracy when he says: "It is not likely that the immediate future of the democratic tendency will satisfy the utmost dreams of the lover of liberty who seeks an anarchist freedom, or of the lover of equality who tries to establish a socialistic dead level, or of the lover of fraternity who dreams of a world-embracing communism."[1]

Several sociologists and political scientists have been conscious of the shortcomings and defects of democracy in practice and have pointed out several methods to vitalize it as a living political and social philosophy. Spencer considered democracy to be an ideal form of government if a high moral and intellectual growth of the citizens could be attained and if they could be made conscious of the creative values of democratic citizenship. Hobhouse and Graham Wallas suggested the increasing vitalization of local governmental units as training-grounds in democracy. The socialist democrats have emphasized the need of substantial if not absolute equalization of wealth as a pre-condition for the success of democracy. In the light of all these discussions a total scepticism about democracy is not justified. Aurobindo also thinks that "some harmonisation of this great ideal is undoubtedly the immediate future of the human race".[2]

Trial and error are necessary for the growth of the moral personality of a man or a group. By repeated experiments

[1] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 39; C.C. Dutt, "The Place of Democracy in Human Evolution", *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, Sixth Number (1950), p. 201.
[2] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 39.

people will learn how to govern themselves. Good and efficient government is not to be considered a substitute for self-government. But self-government has to be made a process of moral evolution. After a very detailed study of modern democratic forms of government Bryce concluded that democracy has not been less successful than monarchies and aristocracies as a mechanism for the elimination of suffering, fear and injustice and even for the growth of culture and civilization. Even from the empirical standpoint it is to be noticed that democracy has evoked collective political experience and wisdom and perhaps there is truth in the view that those who are affected by some problems really know best how to solve them. Hence it is essential to perfect the democratic mechanism from the political and economic standpoint and to evolve the necessary value constellation which would engender faith in the democratic system of life and government. Lester Ward pointed out that democracy had outgrown the physiocratic and the plutocratic phases of its evolution and was entering upon the sociocratic phase when society would act consciously for protecting its interests and socially deviant psychological forces would be considerably weakened. But Aurobindo would not agree that a democracy having destroyed the evils associated with majority rule and party government would be the last stage of social evolution, as is suggested in certain quarters. It would be only the "broad standing-ground upon which the self-consciousness of the social being can come to its own".[1]

Some of the criticisms of Aurobindo against democratic philosophy and practice, e.g., his views regarding the plutocratization of the political process, the growth of the 'elite' and the increasing reduction of the electoral system to a sham by the rise of group and sectional interests, are significant. The psychological basis of his critique of democracy is his conception of "the democratic cultus of the average man".[2] But any criticism of the democratic ideal, from the standpoint of the superior dialectical philosophic reason as in Plato, or of the gnostic consciousness as in Aurobindo, implies that the trained

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 225.
[2] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 928.

intellectuals have a sacred duty to enlighten their fellow human beings and make them creative participants in the process of citizenship.

5. CRITIQUE OF BENTHAMITE UTILITARIANISM

Besides being a critic of the modern representative democracy of the West, Aurobindo is also opposed to the Benthamite utilitarianism as an ethical and political norm.[1] The psychology of utilitarianism postulated metaphysical atomism and a hedonistic outlook. The Benthamite social and political philosophy was a synthesis of individualistic Epicureanism and the traditional empiricism of English ethics as modified by the French materialistic philosophers like Helvetius. The economic foundations of Benthamism were supplied by the classical economists, especially Ricardo and the Physiocrats. Bentham supported free trade, low taxation, the abolition of intermediate economic associations and unfettered competition. Politically, the Benthamites stood for democratic republicanism and an ordered system of law. In his quest for legal reform and systematization Bentham was influenced by Beccaria. Benthamite utilitarianism resembled Hume's ideas in its trenchant opposition to natural law and natural right. Like Thibaut in Germany, it stood for positive law which could effectively conduce to the common interest. Bentham replaced the older theory of natural law by the concept of utility. He thought that "Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of cause and effects, are fastened to their throne."[2] Through a rational legal system the legislator is to foster the greatest happiness of the greatest number. John Stuart Mill tried to systematize the philosophy of utilitaria-

[1] *The Human Cycle*, p. 182: ". . . that extraordinary system of utilitarian ethics discovered in the nineteenth century—the great century of reason and science and utility—by one of its most positive and systematic minds and now deservedly discredited."

[2] J. Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Chap. I, para 1.

nism by integrating the ideas of Bentham and James Mill with those of Comte.

(a) *Critique of Utilitarianism*

Bentham tried to replace the emotionally and valuationally oriented notions of right and justice by the impersonal mathematical concept of utility. Pleasure and pain being universally experienced sentiments could be treated as mathematical quantities and could be balanced against each other by the criterion of the felicific calculus. According to Bentham the greatest good of the greatest number would be equivalent to a maximum of persons obtaining the maximum of pleasures minus a minimum of persons suffering a minimum of pains. Bentham lived in an age when science was progressing fast and like the seventeenth century political thinkers and philosophers he also had a passion for applying the methodology of science to problems of law and politics. Aurobindo refers to the mathematicization of the ethical process involved in Bentham.

Besides criticizing the artificiality involved in treating psychological feelings as mathematically measurable categories, Aurobindo also criticizes Benthamism from the standpoint of idealistic ethics. He condemns "... its shallow portentous errors, its substitution of a practical, outward and occasional test for the inner, subjective and absolute motive of ethics, its reduction of ethical action to an impossibly scientific and quite impracticable jugglery of moral mathematics, attractive enough to the reasoning and logical mind, quite false and alien to the whole instinct and intuition of the ethical being."[1] Aurobindo contrasts the practical, outer and occasional test laid down in Benthamism to the normative, inner, subjective and absolute criteria of motivation and action. He says that good, and not utility, should be the criterion of ethical action.[2]

[1] *The Human Cycle*, pp. 182-3.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 184. In defence of Bentham, however, it could be pointed out that in his discussion of the order of pre-eminence among motives he says: "Of all these sorts of motives, good-will is that of which the dictates, taken in a general view, are surest of coinciding with those of the principle of utility." *Principles of Morals and Legislation* (Oxford, 1948), p. 236.

Even the pursuit of utility based on the notions of a refined altruism leads in the end to the pursuit of "that dangerous pretender — expediency".[1] The defect of the utilitarian standard is that it is highly relativistic; its criterion and application differ and change with different individuals. There is nothing general and universal which can be prescribed for all men and thus the canon of a true ethic is not found in it. For Aurobindo the true criterion of ethical action lies in the perception and realization of the sense of good which exists in man almost by instinct. The sense of good is inherent in man and the adherence to it implies that the individual would maintain fidelity to his social and psychological being, because he will be faithful to his law of nature — *Svadharma* and *Svabhava*. The true law of nature, for the ethical being, is the concretization of good and not the quest for temporary expediency and hedonistic gratification. It is true that in the highest sense the fundamental utility and the fundamental good would become identical, but that can be valid only at an advanced metaphysical level. From the standpoint of moral conduct in the empirical world, Aurobindo is opposed to the mere calculation of personal gain and loss and wants the enshrinement and the pursuit of the "good of others and most widely the good of all". He earnestly pleads that man should "stick to his principle of good, his instinct for good, his vision of good, his intention of good and to govern by that his conduct". According to Aurobindo ethics is not merely a social science and discipline but a way for subjective purification on the path to the realization of the divine. Hence ultimately individual good and social good have to find their fulfilment in a suprarational ultimate good. Aurobindo says: "It has been felt and said from of old that the laws of right, the laws of perfect conduct are the laws of the Gods, eternal beyond, laws that man is conscious of and summoned to obey. . . . But still there is a truth in this ancient superstition and imagination which the rational denial of it misses and the rational confirmations of it, whether Kant's categorical imperative or another, do not altogether restore. If man's conscience is a creation of his evolving nature, if his conceptions of ethical law are mutable and depend on his stage of evolution,

[1] *The Human Cycle*, p. 184.

yet at the root of them there is something constant in all their mutations which lies at the very root of his own nature and of world-nature. And if nature in man and the world is in its beginnings infra-ethical as well as infrarational, as it is at its summit supra-ethical as well as suprarational, yet in that infra-ethical there is something which becomes in the human plane of being the ethical . . . . Below hides that secret of good in all things which the human being approaches and tries to deliver partially through ethical instinct and ethical idea; above is hidden the eternal good which exceeds our partial and fragmentary ethical conceptions."[1]

This second criticism of Aurobindo reminds us of the attacks made by T.H. Green on utilitarianism. Green led the idealist attack against the ethics of utilitarianism. He candidly admitted that the utilitarian creed aims to improve the standard of social action by insisting on the cognizability of the greatest good of the greatest number, but he also pointed out its inadequacy. He says: "We may give utilitarianism, therefore, full credit for the work it has done in rationalising the order of social and political life while holding at the same time that its hedonistic interpretation of well-being, if logically carried out, would deprive it of any practical significance for good; and that, as this interpretation in a speculative age comes to be more dwelt upon by the individual, it may itself induce practical evils, from which deliverance must be sought in a truer analysis of the ultimate good of man."[2] Green tries to advocate the Christian gospel of ultimate good which consists in the perfection of human life. But while Green tends to substitute the excellence and good of the community for any individualistic hedonistic calculus Aurobindo wants to base ethical motivation on an inward and subjective spiritual realization. Both Green and Aurobindo attack utilitarianism from the idealistic standpoint. Green's emphasis is on the good of the community although he considers the individual to have some element of an infinite consciousness in him. Aurobindo's emphasis, however, is on the spiritual perfection of the human being. Several Indian thinkers like Vivekananda, Tilak and Gandhi have criticized

[1] *The Human Cycle*, pp. 186-7.
[2] T.H. Green, *Prolegomena to Ethics*, pp. 402-3.

utilitarianism—all of them from the idealist standpoint—but only the criticisms of Tilak and Aurobindo are elaborate.

(*b*) *Utilitarianism and Indian Political Thought*

In the writings of Tilak, Vivekananda, Gandhi and Aurobindo we find criticisms of Benthamite utilitarianism. It appears that the opposition to utilitarianism from an idealistic standpoint is one of the cardinal principles of modern Indian social and political philosophy. Vivekananda, like Aurobindo, referred to the inadequacy of utilitarianism because it could not prevent a man from being selfish or from resorting to expediency also. Vivekananda thought that without the perception of the superconscious there could be no sound and stable practice of ethics.[1] According to Tilak the intuitionism of Martineau or the utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill are not sufficiently spiritual. He pleads for the cultivation of equanimity and the sense of equality—*Samya*. He thinks that Kant and Green approximate to the standpoint of the Bhagvadgita but he is firm in believing that a person having a balanced mind—*Vyavasayatmika Buddhi*, enjoying the bliss of the ultimate being—is alone capable of perfect ethical action. In the ethical conception of Tilak the central emphasis is on the chastening and regeneration of the human mind. The external criterion of the utility of a large number of beings is not the main point.[2] Tilak interprets the Gita as teaching an ethic of purity of intention, to be attained by Brahman-consciousness. Gandhi also is opposed to the principle of the greatest good of the greatest number because it would imply in a democratic form of government the possible coercion and suppression of the minority. On the basis of the Gita idea of *Sarvabhutahita* he has built up his philosophy of Sarvodaya, the elevation of all.

Generalizing from the arguments of Tilak, Vivekananda, Gandhi and Aurobindo we find that there are two grounds for opposition to utilitarianism in Indian thought. First, the fundamental belief that without the acceptance of an ultimate spiritual being no sound ethics can be built is uppermost in the

[1] *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. II, p. 63; vol. I, pp. 181-2.
[2] B.G. Tilak, *Gita-Rahasya* (in Hindi, Poona, 1950), pp. 83-91.

writings of modern Indian idealists. Ethical relativism, according to Indian thinkers, amounts to selfishness and expediency and may finally lead to gross egoism, ethical nihilism and moral anarchy. They are opposed to the two schools of refined and altruistic hedonism and Benthamite utilitarianism because according to them the highest goal of man is not the pursuit of pleasures, even if qualitatively differentiated as Mill postulates, but the attainment of a blissful state of mental and spiritual realization of the secret spiritual reality. Secondly, European ethics is principally concerned with the happiness and good of human beings and that is due to the influence of the Greek thinkers and Christianity. Indian ethics, under Upanishadic and Buddhistic influence, concerns itself with the problem of the good not of human beings alone but of all living beings. In the idealistic political and ethical thought of India we find a concern not only with human welfare but with the good and welfare of all living beings. Hence Indian thinkers want the replacement of the utilitarian concept of the greatest good of the greatest number by the good of all.

6. CRITIQUE OF CAPITALISM

Aurobindo is opposed to the capitalist system of economy.[1] India, according to him, should not imitate the capitalist system of the West because it intensifies competitive egoism. He views with disfavour the development of capitalist concentrations and monopolistic combines. He regards the growth of trusts and syndicates as "the most dangerous development of capitalism".[2] Marx had emphasized the capitalistic trend towards accumulation, concentration and centralization. Aurobindo is alarmed at the growth of capitalist concentrations because they accentuate the exploitationist power and strength of the capitalists. He says: "In commerce also so long as we follow the European spirit and European model, the individual competitive selfishness, the bond of mere interest in the joint-stock company or that worst and most dangerous development of co-operative capitalism, the giant octopus-like trust and syndicate, we shall never succeed in rebuilding a healthy industrial life."[3]

[1] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 27. [2] *Ibid.* [3] *Ibid.*, p. 26.

Aurobindo, Tagore and Gandhi have been critical of Western capitalism. Several Indian political thinkers like Tilak, Gandhi and Pal wanted the restoration and revitalization of the village community and were opposed to the capitalist system with its tendency towards universal infiltration into all departments of economic life.

Capitalism has been disliked in India also because it was engaged in the political game of imperialistic exploitation of the country. Along with Tilak, Gokhale and Gandhi, Aurobindo criticized the economic policy of England in India. He wrote in thundering words: "The huge price India has to pay England for the inestimable privilege of being ruled by Englishmen is a small thing compared with the murderous drain by which we purchase the more exquisite privilege of being exploited by British capital."[1] Dadabhai Naoroji first made Indians aware of the "drain" of India by Great Britain.[2] The drain of India's financial assets by the clever designs and manipulations of British capitalism and imperial political system is also emphasized in the writings of other Indian political leaders and economists and was one of the factors intensifying Indian nationalism.

After the First World War Aurobindo prophesied the collapse of capitalism. He thought that capitalism had lost its moral force. It was morally discredited because it supported a system which resulted in the exploitation and ruin of the workers. Furthermore, capitalism had also failed to solve the concrete material problems which demanded immediate solution. Aurobindo wrote: "The existing European system of civilisation at least in its figure of capitalistic industrialism has reached its own monstrous limits, broken itself by its own mass and is condemned to perish."[3] Socialism profited from the failures of capitalism. Just as Aurobindo was inspired by the Bolshevic proclamation of the principle of free nationality, so also the success of the Bolshevists in Russia had made him very optimistic

[1] *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, p. 14.
[2] Dadabhai Naoroji, *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India.*
[3] Sri Aurobindo, *After the War*, p. 10. Aurobindo had written this in 1920. But with the passage of time he became less pessimistic about the collapse of capitalism and thought that for the present the world may remain divided between the protagonists of the two rival philosophies of socialism and capitalism.

about the prospects of socialism and communism.[1] He had written: "The issue of the future lies between a labour industrialism not very different except in organisation from its predecessor, some greater spirit and form of socialistic or communistic society such as is being attempted in Russia or else the emergence of a new and as yet unforeseen principle."[2] But although like Marx and Bakunin, Aurobindo is a critic of capitalism he does not advocate violent insurrection or organized proletarian revolution to bring that consummation about. He does not believe that the fall of capitalism is inevitable. It is possible that the world may remain divided between capitalists and communists.[3] He is inspired by the socialist ideal of providing a simply rich and beautiful life for all. But he is hostile to the socialist practice of violence, authoritarianism, regimentation and totalitarian *mystique*. Hence Aurobindo remains a critic both of socialism and capitalism. His own political philosophy is oriented to a spiritualized synthesis of individualism, collectivism and anarchism, and that postulates a moral and spiritual regeneration of man.

7. CRITIQUE OF SOCIALISM AND COMMUNISM

(a) *Political and Economic Foundations of Socialism*

Socialism as a general *Weltanschauung* has been a very ancient tradition. Plato was one of the earliest prophets advocating the community of property and family, at least in the case of the guardians. Communistic sentiments are found in the Bible. There were socialist thinkers like Babeuf in the period of the French Revolution and before the rise of Marxian socialism we find utopian socialists like Saint Simon, Fourier, Owen and others. Socialism has appealed to the deep sentiment of the desire for equality in man.[4] It represents in the modern world

[1] Aurobindo had written that the First World War would be memorable to posterity not for the downfall of Germany but for the Russian Revolution.

[2] *After the War*, p. 10.

[3] "A Postscript Chapter", *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 397.

[4] In an article contributed to the Bombay weekly, the *Indu Prakash*, dated December 4, 1893 (quoted in S. Mitra, *The Liberator*, p. 39), Aurobindo had championed the cause of the proletariat. He wrote: "The proletariat among us is sunk in ignorance and overwhelmed with distress. But with that distressed and

the outcome of a rationalist egalitarian philosophy which believes in the cult of science and progress. Socialism has criticized the huge waste of the capitalist system. It condemns the phenomenon of chronic unemployment, crises and the mechanical minute division of labour which nullifies all aesthetic joy in work.

According to Aurobindo, the Darwinian-Spencerian formula of evolution led to the evolution of the concept of a social organism and this concept helped the "development of economic socialism."[1] Some of the great socialists like Marx and Engels have accepted the biological theory of evolution. Marx was glad to note that the method he was following in the social sciences was similar to the method Darwin was following in the natural sciences.

Socialism, says Aurobindo, has been considerably influenced by individualism. In Europe the age of individualism has been historically an age of the predominance of science with its objective search after uniform laws of nature. Individualism professes two aims of thought and action.[2] First, it wants a universalized canon of objective truth for testing human judgments. Secondly, it wants a generalized norm as a pattern for the organization of the social being. In searching for these two objectives the age of individualism helped the rise of socialism. Aurobindo says: "In seeking the truth and law of his own being the individual seems to have discovered a truth and law which is not of his own individual being at all, but of the collectivity, the pack, the hive, the mass. The result to which this points and to which it still seems irresistibly to be driving us is a new ordering of society by a rigid economic or governmental socialism. . . ."[3]

It is possible to point out various legacies left by individualism to socialism and communism. First, individualism has transmitted to socialism the belief in the efficacy of human reason and

ignorant proletariat . . . with that proletariat resides, whether we like it or not, our sole assurance of hope, our sole chance in the future. . . . Theorist and trifler I may be called, I again assert as our first and holiest duty the elevation and enlilghtenment of the proletariat."

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *Evolution*, p. 2. The concept of the struggle of classes in some schools of socialism runs counter, however, to the idea of the social organism.

[2] *The Human Cycle*, p. 20.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 21-2.

science to plan a better society leading to greater progress. Individualistic liberalism, as Karl Mannheim points out, has given to socialism the habit of thinking in "generalising terms". The tendency to use the categories of reason for congnizing the complex web of social and political action, socialism derives from liberalism. Secondly, socialism also, like individualist liberalism, believes in the concept of political equality, but it wants to supplement the liberal theory of political equality with social and economic equality. In several countries one finds that the ideal of individualistic democracy is being supplemented with the ideal of socialistic democracy wherein social and political equality would be maintained by a state "which is the organised will of the whole community".[1] Thirdly, it is also possible to mention an important legacy, the labour theory of value of Smith and Ricardo, which was taken up by Marx and used as a methodological and critical instrument to damn the bourgeois society. In spite of the fact that socialism was opposed to individualism, one should not be unmindful of some of the fundamental common points between them. The Austrian sociologist Schäffle said "both liberalism and socialism are offspring of the same spirit of individualism, a pair of Siamese twins".[2] Thus we see that Aurobindo's view of the great influence of individualism and reason upon socialism is substantially correct.

Socialism has taken up the ideology of commercialism from the bourgeoisie.[3] But there is an attempt to build a proletarian economy in place of a capitalist economy. Socialism aims at an equitable distribution of the wealth of the society, or else would like to concentrate wealth in the hands of the state. But there is a significant element of commercialism even in socialism. The trend or the ethos of commercialism is a necessary product of the present day civilization of the West which is built on what Veblen calls the predominance of pecuniary motivation.[4] Aurobindo says: "The society, still more than the family, is

[1] *The Human Cycle*, p. 251.

[2] Albert Schäffle, "Socialism", *E.S.S.* Also refer to William Wallace, "The Relation of Fichte and Hegel to Socialism" in his *Lectures and Essays*.

[3] *The Human Cycle*, p. 263n.

[4] Cf. Tawney's phrase "the acquisitive society" applied to the modern socio-economic system; John Dewey refers to the predominance of "money culture" in the U.S.A.

essentially economic in its aims and in its very nature. That accounts for the predominantly economic and materialistic character of modern ideas of socialism, for these ideas are the full rationalistic flowering of this instinct of collective life."[1] The early communistic philosophy of Plato and the Christian monastics was transcendental and ascetic in its orientation. Modern socialism is the result of acute and distressing maladjustments of social wealth. It is very deeply secularistic and terrestrial in its endeavour and outlook. Platonic communism was based on an economy of scarcity. It pleaded for an ethics of self-abnegation. Modern socialism aims at the accentuation of productive powers and it visualizes an era of abundance of commodities for all people. It stresses not an equality based on negation of wants but a maximization of the production of commodities for satisfying the needs of all. As an economic and social philosophy, socialism is a product of modern Western capitalistic civilization. Although the socialist movement arose in opposition to capitalism, it has adopted several elements from the fundamental value-patterns of the latter.[2]

Socialism, according to Aurobindo, is an extension of the national idea. "Socialism is really an attempt to complete the growth of the national community by making the individual do what he has never yet done, live for the community more than for himself. It is an outgrowth of the national, not of the international idea."[3] It is possible to demonstrate the empirical and historical connexion between socialism and the national idea. According to Max Weber, socialism would complete the process of extending the power of the national state to the realm of economics. Since the end of feudalism, the national state had tried to concentrate in its own hands the control of the military and administrative mechanisms. In the feudal period there had been no centrally controlled army. There was no organized and formalized system of administration. The feudal barons interposed intermediate authorities between the king at the top and the people at the bottom. Since the sixteenth century there began in Europe the great process of formation of national

[1] *The Human Cycle*, p. 200.
[2] N. Berdyaev, *The Meaning of History*, p. 218.
[3] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 346-7.

sovereign states. The rise of the modern state gave the death blow to feudalism, first in England and later on in France. It devised a centrally controlled and managed administrative mechanism. It became the sole controller of the army. No other agency could maintain an army. This was tantamount to the centralization or nationalization of the military and administrative 'means'. Socialism represents a further process of the extension of this trend of nationalization in the economic sphere. Socialism, according to Max Weber, would complete the power of the state over a hitherto autonomous sphere of individual ownership and control—economic life. This sociological analysis of Max Weber can be used to substantiate Aurobindo's thesis that socialism is an outgrowth of the national idea.

But socialism has also shown international tendencies. According to Aurobindo socialism has been international and pacific because of the conditions of its birth. War is favourable to the rule of the upper classes and is used in their interests, while the classes whose interests socialism claims to represent do not hope to gain by war. The upper classes, being the ruling group, obtain territories or profits as a result of war. They may gain additional areas from where they can obtain raw materials or which they can use as markets for their commodities. The labouring classes, on the other hand, do not obtain any tangible gain from wars. They have to provide themselves as cannon-fodder. Lenin regarded the First World War as an imperialist war and advised the socialists and the proletariat to remain away from it and not be enticed into it by the powerful cries of militarists and nationalists. Socialism and syndicalism have taken upon themselves the mission of achieving international proletarian solidarity. Marx had called on the workers of the world to unite and thus heralded proletarian internationalism. Sombart differentiates between the two schools of socialist philosophy—nationalist and internationalist. He thinks that socialism is a practical programme of social rationalization with anti-chrematistic tendencies. It has two subdivisions. The first type of socialism as found in Plato, Campanella, Fichte, St. Simon and Rodbertus, accepts an organic, morphological, tectonic, concrete, national, state socialism. The second, on the

other hand, is mechanical, abstract and equalitarian and is international in its outlook. This is the kind of socialism, Sombart thinks, that one finds in Karl Marx. Schumpeter suggests that being an exile with no national home or patriotic sentiment Marx became an internationalist and imagined that, since he did not have a country, the workers did not have one either. But in spite of a theoretical adherence to internationalism, the growth of socialism as a movement has been marked by a progressive concession to the strong influence of nationalism. During the First World War all socialist leaders, except Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg, supported their respective countries in the fight. Hence Aurobindo wrote: "... German socialism, the protagonist of the idea [of internationalism] massively leading the way in this formidable abjuration. It is true that a small minority in each country either remained heroically faithful to its principles or soon returned to them. . . . Russian socialism, it may be said, has, at least in its extremer form, shown a stronger root of internationalistic feeling. But what it has actually attempted to accomplish is a development of Labour rule on the basis of a purified nationalism, non-aggressive except for revolutionary purposes and self-contained, and not on the larger international idea."[1]

Aurobindo refers to the role of the intellectuals in the development and spread of the socialist ideology and movement. A dominant factor for the success of socialism is that it is an economic philosophy trying to give a meaning and coherence to the struggle of the labouring classes. Intellectuals also have played a significant role in the socialist movement. According to Aurobindo socialism and syndicalism "have been a revolt of labour aided by a number of intellectuals against the established state of things."[2] In the early stages of industrialism it was socialist thinkers who voiced sentiments of protest against it. Only later on, with the growth of an expansive and exploitationist industrialism, did the labouring masses become intellectually conscious of their sufferings. Socialism as a movement has profited undoubtedly by the teachings of a large number of intellectuals like Owen, St. Simon, Marx, Engels,

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 346.
[2] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 347.

Lassalle and even Plekhanov and Lenin. Lenin definitely accepted that class-consciousness among the proletariat is not a spontaneous emergent but has to be consciously created by an organized party. But the role of intellectuals in the socialist movement should not be over-emphasized. The role of objective economic forces in the evolution of the socialist movement is more important, because they have created the numerous contradictions in society which demand imperative solution. Schumpeter has pointed out that socialism has succeeded not so much because of the intellectuals but because of the Rockefellers and the Carnegies.[1] It seems that the intellectuals have joined the socialist movement primarily because of a sentimental attachment to the moral appeal of socialism. Socialism perhaps has provided a philosophy in which the intellectuals could find mental peace and consolation in a society which has lost its old religious and moral values in a scientific and secularist age.

(*b*) *Critique of Socialism*

To Aurobindo socialism does not mean the substitution of the power of the bourgeois state by a spontaneously cooperative non-coercive social syndicate. It amounts to the full efflorescence and concretization of state power. "The state principle leads necessarily to uniformity, regulation, mechanisation, its inevitable end is socialism. There is nothing fortuitous, no room for chance in political and social development, and the emergence of socialism was no accident or a thing that might not have been, but the inevitable result contained in the very seed of the state idea."[2]

The idea of socialism as the consummation of the increasing power of the state was implicit in the work of the Alfreds and the Charlemagnes and other national and imperial unifiers[3] of the Middle Ages. It is true that monarchical absolutism has generated, several times, moral and intellectual stagnation and has invited revolutions, but it was an inevitable stage in the evolution of the historical process. Even in spite of its failures

[1] Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, p. 124.
[2] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 286-7.
[3] *Ibid.*

it has been fruitful because "the absolutist monarchical state was the father of the modern idea of the absolutist socialistic state. . . . It was, for all its vices, a necessary step because only so could the clear idea of an intelligently self-governing society firmly evolve."[1]

As a spiritualist, Aurobindo is intensely attracted by the social and economic egalitarianism of socialism while at the same time he has a great horror of socialist authoritarianism. Organized socialism, even if it be a democratic socialism, signifies to him the absence of liberty. He thinks that "state control and direction [are] the essence of socialism".[2] The full development of socialism would mean the obliteration of the distinction between social and political activities, a distinction which is so vital in the liberal outlook. Under socialistic control even social activities would become spheres of state interference. It means the thorough extension of the administrative activities of the state. "Nothing great or small escapes its purview. Birth and marriage, labour and amusement and rest, education, culture, training of physique and character, the socialist state leaves nothing outside its scope and its busy intolerant control."[3] It signifies the full proliferation of the omnipotent state leviathan. Socialism represents the omnicompetence of the all-jealous state and therefore, according to Aurobindo, totalitarianism is the natural, almost inevitable destiny of socialism.[4] Max Weber and the Austrian school of economists also are alarmed at this growth of the power of the state in socialism. Weber thinks socialism signifies not the dictatorship of the proletariat but the dictatorship of the official. It would lead to a greater extension of bureaucratization.[5]

The great schools of socialist philosophy contemplate the eventual elimination of the coercive state power. We find this principle enunciated in Russian Communism and French Syndicalism. The Guild Socialism of Hobson and Cole also postulates the reduction of the authoritarianism of the central parliament. But Aurobindo is apprehensive of the extension of state power under socialism. He is a critic of socialist centrali-

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 231.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 169n.
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 282-3.
[4] *The Human Cycle*, p. 254.
[5] From Max Weber: *Essays in Sociology*, pp. 49-50.

zation and authoritarianism. Socialism considers the state to be a means for the collective operation of the resources of the society. But in the process of the management and administration of the economic instruments of the social totality, socialism would imply heightened accentuation of state power. Despotism is not the essence of socialism because if it were then socialism would mean the same thing as the absolutism of old. In spite of the essential similarity between absolutism and socialism with regard to the concentration of state power, socialism has an essential and fundamental orientation to the good of the common man because it abolishes the private use of means of production for the purposes of exploitation. But in the process of the realization of the good of the common man socialism would necessitate the extension of the control of government departments over nationalized industries and services. Thus the dangers of centralization and state control are implicit in socialism in spite of theoretical adherence to the cult of the "withering away" of the state in some circles. Like Mosca and Max Weber, Aurobindo also is a critic of the increasing dominance of the state under socialism.

Socialism contemplates the elimination of class exploitation and economic competition and the establishment of an all-coordinating governance and organization of socio-economic life by the state. Certainly it has an idealistic motivation because it wants to use the conscious reason and will of the organized society for achieving the common interest of all, but the mechanism for this crystallization is the powerful state. It is possible that this aim could be realized with democratic machinery. According to Aurobindo in the Scandinavian countries "a temporising, reformist practical socialism compromising between the right regulation of the communal life and the freedom of the individual has to some extent made good".[1] There is some chance of a successful collectivist rationalization of society on a democratic pattern. "But if a non-democratic polity and machinery are found to serve the purpose better, then there is nothing inherently sacrosanct for the collectivist mind in the democratic ideal; it can be thrown in the rubbish-heap where so many other exploded sanctities have gone."[2]

[1] *The Human Cycle*, p. 251n. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 254.

In several schools of European thought we find plans for equal distribution of property. Phaleas of Chalcedon and Harrington advocated equalization of property in land. But modern socialism is not equivalent to economic equalitarianism. "To eliminate poverty, not by the crude idea of equal distribution but by the holding of all property in common and its management by the organised state, to equalise opportunity and capacity as far as possible through universal education and training, again by means of the organized state, is the fundamental idea of modern socialism."[1] Socialization of the means of production is bound to lead to the growth of the power of the state. As chances are, the insistent challenge of economic problems can not long be neglected and "the democracies of the future are likely to be strongly concentrated governments in which the principle of liberty is subordinated to the efficient life of the community by some form of state socialism".[2] Democracy postulates the consummation of a free and self-conscious rational individual by providing opportunities of political choice and decision for him. The full realization of this idea may take a long time. "It does not follow that a true democracy must necessarily come into being at some time. For man individually or collectively to come to a full self-consciousness is a most difficult tangle. Before a true democracy can be established, the process is likely to be overtaken by a prematurely socialistic endeavour."[3] It is possible that a democratic state socialism might extend its power of war-making more than is possible in the bourgeois democracies.

Russian communism began a systematic destruction of all democratic formulas and practices since its forcible dissolution of the Russian Constituent Assembly in 1918, "but it has preserved the idea of a proletarian equality for all in a classless society. Still its spirit is a rigorous totalitarianism on the basis of the dictatorship of the proletariate, which amounts in fact to the dictatorship of the communist party in the name or on behalf of the proletariate."[4] Totalitarianism has become the socialist methodology in Russia. We find totalitarianism in non-socialist politics too. In Sparta there was a vigorous regimentation.

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 84.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 255.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 225n.
[4] *The Human Cycle*, p. 225.

Hobbes also contemplates some type of totalitarianism. To Aurobindo totalitarianism, whether it be practised by fascism or communism, spells repression, savagery and tyranny and he is vigorously opposed to that.

In the Marxian theory a distinction is made between the earlier and the higher phases of communism. In the earlier phase there will be the dictatorship of the proletariat which will consolidate the work of the expropriation of the capitalists and will solidify the socialist regime. The higher phase will mark the withering away of the state because the process of exploitation having ceased, there would be no need of the state; the modern state is only the executive committee of the bourgeoisie. It will have grown superfluous and will vanish out of existence as an unnecessary anachronism. Aurobindo is not very sanguine about the realizability of the Marxist dream. Having in mind the tremendous and gigantic problems of modern social and economic existence Aurobindo is very sceptical about the eventuation of "a stateless communism which is supposed to be the final goal of the Russian ideal."[1]

According to Aurobindo the ideal of the perfectly organized state is socialistic.[2] The relation between socialism, state and totalitarianism has been elaborately studied in Western social and political philosophy. Spengler held that the Prussian concept of the *Obrigkeitsstaat* (the authoritarian state) influenced Marx, and that was why the latter thought that the state control of economic means and resources would lead to a better future. Masaryk also accepted the influence of the Prussian state system on Marx.[3] Since the rise of the great Elector and the growth of Brandenburg-Prussia, authoritarianism and a growing control over the social and economic activities of the people were marked in Germany. It is true that in Germany there developed not only the Prussian ideal of totalitarianism but also the philosophy of the exaltation and sometimes even the apotheosis of state power. Both Marx and Lassalle, the two towering names in the labour movement, were Germans, and it is not very far-fetched to think that the strong faith of socialism in the extension of state control represents Germanic influence.

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 271. [2] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 83.
[3] T.G. Masaryk, *The Making of a State*, p. 308.

Marx thought that socialism meant the increase of social and economic rationalization. He held that socialism is based on science and reason. But generalizing from the practice in several countries, Aurobindo emphasizes the new growth of a totalitarian *mystique* and a collectivist *mystique*. The concept of reason seems to be replaced by a revolutionary mysticism which appears to be the turn and drive of the *Zeitgeist*.[1] Aurobindo says: "In Russia the Marxist system of socialism has been turned almost into a gospel. Originally a rationalistic system worked out by a logical thinker and discoverer and systematiser of ideas, it has been transformed by the peculiar turn of the Russian mind into something like a social religion, a collectivist *mystique*, an inviolable body of doctrines with all denial or departure treated as a punishable heresy, a social cult enforced by the intolerant piety and enthusiasm of a converted people."[2]

The mystical and religious element in Marxism and Russian communism stressed by Aurobindo has also been elaborately discussed by various writers.[3] Toynbee, Sombart and Berdyaev have represented Marxism as the secularization of the Judaic and Christian eschatology. There is the same passionate condemnation of existing evils and iniquities and the same fervent millenialism and futurism in Marxism as in the old Semitic religions. The proletariat is regarded almost as the redeemer, and the idea of a dramatic struggle leading to a happy finale becomes the teleology of the religious dialectic of Marxism. Since the Renaissance there has been growing secularization and disenchantment in the Western world and the old theological goals and values have been re-interpreted in a secular spirit. Becker and Berdyaev think that the eighteenth century creed of progress, which is a fundamental element in the socialist philosophy, is only a secularized and rationalized form of the

[1] But Aurobindo did not believe that totalitarian mysticism would be able to invade completely rational idealism. *The Human Cycle*, pp. 255-7.

[2] *The Human Cycle*, p. 255. Aurobindo also refers to the swing away from rationalism to a vital subjectivism and to a totalitarian *mystique* also in the Fascist countries. For a discussion of irrationalism in modern thought, see V.P. Varma, *Irrationalism: Philosophical and Sociological* (Banaras, Motilal Banarsidass, 1951).

[3] P.A. Sorokin; *Contemporary Sociological Theories* (New York, 1928), pp. 539-42, refers to the works of Novgorodzev, Gehrlich and Struve for the interpretation of Marxism as "a variety of the belief in a millennium".

old Semitic belief in the eventual millenium and the return of the messiah. This hypothesis of Becker and Berdyaev involves a great amount of imaginative romanticism, but it does represent a great truth. Society does not radically change its fundamental and prime concepts and values but only reshapes them. The conversion of the economic doctrines of Marx and Engels into an infallible scripture represents only the characteristic ways and actions of the Russian Slavic temper. Berdyaev has treated this theme at great length and with great profundity in his book *The Origin of Russian Communism.* The Russian mind is integral and thinks not in terms of segments and compartments but in terms of an all-explaining philosophy. It must have a *Weltanschauung* that offers a complete explanation of the cosmos, society and individual destiny. As distinguished from the metaphysical temper of the Germans, the Russians have been deeply religious in their outlook. The older Russian ideas of Moscow being the third Rome have reappeared in the form of the modern creed that communism is the panacea of mankind and the initiator of the age of freedom in place of necessity. Russian orthodoxy and autocracy have for centuries trained the Russians in the art of conformity and total allegiance to the powers that be, and the loyalty that was given to the Holy Church is now being given to the new priesthood of the communist party. Hence Berdyaev says that "... Russian communism is more traditional than is commonly thought and that it is a transformation and deformation of the old Russian messianic idea. Communism in Western Europe would be an entirely different phenomenon in spite of the similarity of Marxist theories. To the traditional Russian character of communism are due both its positive and its negative sides. On the one hand the search for the Kingdom of God and integrated truth and justice, capacity for sacrifice and the absence of the bourgeois spirit; on the other hand, the absoluteness of the state and despotism, a feeble grasp of the rights of man and the danger of a featureless collectivism."[1] According to Berdyaev "the Soviet Government, ... is the one totalitarian state in the world which is carried to its logical consistent end; it is a transforma-

[1] N. Berdyaev, *The Origin of Russian Communism* (London, Geoffrey Bles, 1948), pp. 187-8.

tion of the ideas of Ivan the Terrible, a new form of the terrible hypertrophy of the state in Russian history."[1] The corroborating testimony of a profound scholar of the Russian situation like Berdyaev would show that Aurobindo is substantially correct in his references to the rise of subjectivism, mystical integral totalitarianism and an emotional vitalism in some of the modern states that go by the name of 'socialist'.

Aurobindo is critical of the hesitating and vacillating character of social democracy which at times led to the rise of totalitarianism and dictatorship in several countries.[2] Social democracy failed to make the decisive choice between the alternatives of socialistic regimentation and democratic liberty. Therefore, it failed and had to yield to the "more vigorous and ruthlessly logical forces of communism and fascism".[3] The vacillating policy of social democracy in Germany from 1918-32, due to the weakness of Ebert, von Papen and Brunning, led to the rise of Hitlerite Germany.

Although favourable to the egalitarianism of the socialist ideology and critical only of its state absolutism, Aurobindo envisages that at some future time socialism might possibly become even imperialistic.[4] He says: "And if socialism triumphs in the leading nations of the world, it will inevitably seek to impose its rule everywhere not only by indirect pressure, but even by direct intervention in what it could consider backward countries."[5] This possibility arises not only from the inherent trend of power-structures to expand, but also from an ideological missionary spirit in socialism. Perhaps a strong socialist state would try to foster a socialist revolution in the neighbouring country. If it succeeds, there is nothing in theoretical logic or in the dynamics of the situation to prevent it from imposing its own political power on that country, provided it can do. Constituted as the world is on the basis of vast disproportions of wealth and power among the various countries and peoples, the possibility of the growth of imperialism in

[1] N. Berdyaev, *The Origin of Russian Communism*, p. 186.
[2] *The Human Cycle*, pp. 250-1n. [3] *Ibid.*
[4] Max Weber also is of the view that state-socialist communities may use force where it would lead easily to favourable conditions of exchange. From Max Weber: *Essays in Sociology*, p. 169.
[5] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 282-3.

socialistic countries, as envisaged by Aurobindo, does not seem improbable. In spite of professions to the contrary, there are chances that if socialism triumphs in the relatively advanced countries of Europe and America it may develop racial prejudice and may not be willing to concede equality to the weaker nations.

Aurobindo is also critical of modern fascism.[1] Mussolini, a one-time socialist, became the promulgator of fascist ideology. Aurobindo says: "The connection between socialism and the democratic or equalitarian idea or the revolt of the proletariate is, however, an accident of history, not its essence. In Italian fascism there arose a socialism undemocratic and non-equalitarian in its form, idea and temper."[2] Students of Italian fascism like Schneider, Finer, Max Ascoli and others are agreed in thinking that fascism made no vital attacks on the property system at all.[3] Its opposition to capitalism was nominal. It firmly stabilized the power of the capitalists.

(c) *The Future of Socialism and Communism*

Aurobindo thought that a possible tussle between capitalism and communism might occur.[4] He is aware of the bipolarization of the world political structure after the Second World War. He thinks that the U.S.A. has been traditionally "pacific and non-imperialistic in sentiment and principle"[5] but there is "an undertone of nationalistic susceptibility which threatened recently to take an imperialistic turn and led the nation to make two or three wars ending in conquests whose results it had then to reconcile with its non-imperialistic pacifism."[6] The Bolshevics had come to power through force and violence and hence they accepted the idea of mustering sufficient strength and spreading their ideology in the outside world. ". . . the fierceness of this struggle generated in the minds of the organisers of the new state a fixed idea of the necessity not only of survival but of continued struggle and the spread of its domination until the new order had destroyed the old or evicted it, if not from the

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 283n. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 265n; *Ibid.*, p. 283n.
[3] H.W. Schneider, *Making the Fascist State* (New York, 1928); Herman Finer, *Mussolini's Italy* (New York, 1935).
[4] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 157. [5] *Ibid.*, p. 319. [6] *Ibid.*, p. 319.

whole earth, yet from the greater part of it and the imposition of a new political and social gospel or its general acceptance by the world's peoples."[1] Referring to the expansionist urge in communism Aurobindo wrote: "... it now seems probable that the future will belong to a struggle between communism and a surviving capitalistic Industrialism in the New World or even between communism and a more moderate system of social democracy in the two continents of the Old World."[2]

But Aurobindo thinks that a final Armageddon between communism and capitalism is not inevitable.[3] According to Lenin and Stalin a final struggle between the protagonists of the two ideologies is bound to occur. Aurobindo does not adhere to that kind of destructive determinism. He visualizes the possibility of a *rapprochement* although in some of his earlier writings he also accepted the inevitability of a future duel between socialism and bourgeois-democracy. He holds that the real source of the trouble in international politics is the idea of using the ideological struggle as a means for world domination. "If this element is eliminated, a world in which these two ideologies could live together, arrive at an economic interchange, draw closer together, need not be at all out of the question; for the world is moving towards a greater development of the principles of state control over the life of the community, and a congeries of socialistic states on the one hand and on the other, of states co-ordinating and controlling a modified capitalism might well come to exist side by side and develop friendly relations with each other."[4]

Aurobindo does not believe that communism is committed to a nihilistic destruction of existing world civilization, as it is

[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 386-7. For the study of the nature and character of the Russian Revolution see L. Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, 3 vols; E.H. Carr, *The Russian Revolution*, 2 vols; M.N. Roy, *The Russian Revolution.*

[2] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 157.

[3] It is true that sometimes Aurobindo also referred to the inevitability of a struggle between the two ideologies. He wrote in *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 252: "... the inevitable future duel between the young Titan, Socialism and the old Olympian gods of a bourgeois-democratic world." *But he modified his earlier views regarding the inevitability of a struggle between the two ideologies.* In the postscript chapter of *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 395, Aurobindo wrote: "... in spite of certain possibilities or tendencies created by recent events in the Far East, a division of the earth between the two systems, capitalistic and socialistic, seems for the present a more likely issue."

[4] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 387.

misrepresented to be by some of its rabid opponents. Communism is not destructive of the individual autonomy and liberty preached by individualism although it may be against its anti-social operation in the hands of capitalists. The existing communist states in the world are not, however, to be regarded as real exemplifications of communism but are only constructions of an "inordinately rigid state socialism".[1] There is the possibility that socialism may break away from its attachment to the philosophy of historical materialism which enunciates the supreme role of force as a historical dynamic. It is also possible that socialism may evolve along cooperative patterns which would lessen the rigours of bureaucratic constraint. As the world situation now stands, Aurobindo does not believe that socialism would become generally prevalent in the world. It is possible that the world would be divided between the two systems, socialistic and capitalistic.

The practical success of socialistic philosophy, either in a moderate form as in the northern European countries, or in the extreme form as in Russia and China, shows that it has a profound moral appeal. Its search for concrete social and economic justice gives to it a significant and deeply sentimental character. It promises a new Rome and a new Jerusalem to the exploited humanity and therefore it has a tremendous appeal. Although critical of Western socialist philosophy with its cult of violence, even Gandhi prided himself on being a socialist, but a socialist in his own way. Because of the socialist dream to build a kingdom of plenty and prosperity, not for a section or a class but for all peoples, there are chances that in the Eastern countries socialism may have a great future. That capitalism is not the inevitable and necessary intermediate stage in the transition from feudalism to socialism has been shown in several countries. That capitalism is not the inevitable breeding-ground of the causes that lead to the socialist revolution is also being demonstrated in several highly industrialized countries of the world. In the U.S.A. socialism never has had any significant appeal. The older socialists thought that the socialist revolution would take place in the highly advanced West-European countries and America. But in recent times there has occurred the move-

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 397.

ment which I would call the "Asiatization and Agrarianization of socialism".[1] Socialism is coming to be accepted in the relatively under-developed and backward agrarian countries of Eastern Europe and Asia. Hence I think that perhaps there might occur a tussle in the Asian countries between an entrenched feudalism and a rising agrarian-socialist group. It is significant from the standpoint of Asian politics that the ideal of the social and economic betterment of the people, as formulated by socialism, has greatly appealed to Aurobindo.[2]

But the great dilemma of socialism is its ambivalent juxtaposition of justice for the individual and power for the state. This is the central paradox of socialist freedom. It promises freedom from exploitation and economic insecurity but it is difficult for it to check state bureaucratization, in spite of some of the socialist schools being committed to a democratic ideology, because it is in the inherent dynamics of social power that the increase of functions means increase of power. Aurobindo appreciates the economic philosophy of socialism because it promises a rich and aesthetically cultivated life for all, but is intensely critical of the political techniques of organized socialist absolutism. The trenchant opposition of Aurobindo to socialist practice rests on political grounds. But even if a mechanism could be devised to integrate socialism and democracy, Aurobindo thinks it can only achieve temporary success. Without the spiritual transformation of human character no lasting solution can be achieved. The ultimate solution according to him would lie in the spiritual synthesis of individualism and communism.

Aurobindo refers to the spirit of comradeship in modern collectivism but thinks that state omnipotence and social brotherhood do not go well together. "But comradeship without liberty and equality can be nothing more than the like association of all—in common service to the life of the nation under the absolute control of the collectivist state."[3] Aurobindo

[1] V.P. Varma, "Marxism and Vedanta", *The Visvabharati Quarterly*, Autumn, 1954, pp. 131-52.

[2] Letter of Sri Aurobindo to Joseph Baptista, Pondichery, Jan. 5, 1926, reproduced in *The National Herald*, Lucknow, April 3, 1951. In this letter Sri Aurobindo affirms that he was a social democrat of some kind.

[3] *The Human Cycle*, p. 253.

would plead for a deeper sentiment of fraternity as the real social bond.[1] A feeling of common spiritual fraternity led to the rapid success of Buddhism and also of Christianity. A similar spiritual bond has to be cultivated again. Aurobindo thinks that the socialists are mistaken in attempting to build a regime of equality in the absence of spiritual fraternity.[2]

In spite of the excesses of certain countries which profess the creed of communism, it is possible that communism could become an aid to the fulfilment of the individual and the perfect harmony of the collective being. It may be possible to evolve a spiritual synthesis of individualism and communism. Aurobindo visualizes the dawn of "... the spiritual comradeship which is the expression of an inner realisation of oneness. For so only can egoism disappear and the true individualism of the unique godhead in each man found itself on the true communism of the equal godhead in the race."[3]

Aurobindo is hostile to the modern political and economic formulas devised by Western political thinkers. Democracy, according to him, is corrupted by the invasion of plutocracy, elitism and majoritarianism. Capitalism has been unable to serve the interests of society. Socialism, although it believes in equality and a rich and beautiful life for all, does in actual practice lead to state omnicompetence, authoritarianism and totalitarian *mystique*. Although democracy and socialism mark the self-conscious evolution of the social structure Aurobindo does not regard them as ultimate political solutions. The final solution of the problems of man lies in the advent of a spiritualized society with inner governance, true self-realization and the realization of the significance of the collectivity.

8. THE CONCEPT OF FREEDOM

The concept of freedom is supremely important both in metaphysics and in political philosophy. Vedantism and

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *After the War*, p. 13: "Socialism may bring in a greater equality and a closer association into human life, but if it is only a material change, it may miss other needed things and even aggravate the mechanical burden of humanity and crush more heavily towards the earth its spirit."

[2] Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, p. 118; *Dharma Aur Jatiyata* (in Hindi), pp. 123-4.

[3] *The Human Cycle*, p 274.

Buddhism emphasize the necessity of freedom from the domination of the forces of inconscience. They teach the value of emancipation from empirical relativism. They condemn man's immersion in wordly phenomena and the limitations of the ego. Freedom according to Vedanta is the primordial indeterminate power of supreme delight and creative abundance. The Brahman in his essential timeless poise is utter being, the same Brahman in the context of time-eternity is unconditional free self-determination. The spatio-temporal world of contingent dimensions has its basis in the dynamic and free will-to-becoming of Ishwara. German idealism conceived freedom to be the essence of the spirit. In world-history we find that some of the greatest political movements were directed to the realization of liberty. The French Revolution heralded the gospel of liberty, along with equality and fraternity.

Freedom is the sign of individuality. It betokens the potency of the thinking human being for untrammelled creativism. It is the necessary propulsive force for the growth of self-consciousness. So long as man is engrossed in satisfying the demands of nature he does not care for spiritual freedom. But on awakening to the realization of his creative destiny he begins to long for liberty and immortality. Freedom amounts to the assertion of the demand for an autonomous sector of existence amidst what appears to be the reign of an all-powerful necessity—whether it be a theological or a metaphysical or a naturalistic necessitarianism. Freedom gives to man a sense of spontaneous operation and activity amidst the terrific onrush of social and cosmic forces, and therefore it means not only the growth of the power of independent decision-making amidst the flux of dynamic psychological impulsions but also the capacity to assert the individual's inherent dignity against social and political constraints.

In one sense it can be said that the whole career of Aurobindo was an incessant fight for freedom.[1] In the early days (1905-1910) he was struggling for the emancipation of his countrymen from an alien regime. He was one of the important leaders of the extremist Nationalist Party. He was fighting for political and economic freedom — Swaraj and Swadeshi. In his later

[1] Cf. *Letters*: *Second Series*, p. 77.

Pondichery days (1910-1950) he was fighting on a spiritual plane for the descent of supramental power for the moral and spiritual freedom of humanity from the forces of darkness and inconscience. This was a fight for spiritual freedom, which was to be attained by the integral transformation of the present-day imperfect organization of mental consciousness.

The problem of freedom is discussed at various levels. First, there is the metaphysical approach. The great question in metaphysics concerning liberty and necessity is an old problem. There may be either a spiritual necessity or a physical necessity controlling the movements of the world; freedom signifies the conquest of this necessity. The metaphysical approach to freedom emphasizes the release of the individual man from the limitations of the ego and physical nature and the attainment of full, complete spiritual power. Secondly, the psychological approach to the problem of freedom analyzes the question of autonomy of the will and motivation. It discusses the genesis of individual judgements and actions — whether they proceed from one's own wishes or from an external source of coercion and imposition. Thirdly, the sociological approach to the problem of freedom investigates the question of social and political liberty — that is, freedom from the encroachments and demands of the state or society. In the writings of Aurobindo we find a very comprehensive analysis and discussion of this problem of freedom.

(*a*) *Reality and Freedom: Theory of Spiritual Freedom*

The spiritual problem for man, as Aurobindo sees it, is the quest for divine perfection and immortality, which means the establishment of an infinite freedom in place of mechanical necessity. He does not accept the theory that cosmic phenomena proceed from the mechanical inevitability of a non-rational natural necessity, but believes in the teleological involution and evolution in the world of the transcendent-universal spiritual absolute. The aspect of abstract blind necessity that one finds in nature is also a part of the mechanism of the absolute; "...in the substance of the Inconscience there is a self-protective law of blind imperative necessity which limits the play of the possi-

bilities that emerge from it or enter into it and prevents them from establishing their free action and result or realising the intensity of their own absolute."[1] But supreme and infinite freedom is the essential and inmost nature of the spirit, and the necessity in nature can be transmuted into a full and resplendent freedom. "The hard curve of a blind necessity" which is written on the face of matter is only an apparent phenomenon. It is possible by the attainment of spiritual power to resist, in individual life and action, the inexorable natural necessity that is often conceived as fate. "Fate and free-will are only two movements of one indivisible energy. My will is the first instrument of my fate, fate a will that manifests itself in the irresistible subconscious intention of the world."[2] According to the philosophy of the Tantra, freedom can be realized on this earth and is not a mere supra-terrestrial precious hope. Freedom consists in man becoming a conscious voluntary instrument of the supreme creative energy. Aurobindo also says that absolute freedom, even when within the bounds of the mortal frame, can be won if one makes a voluntary self-surrender to the supreme spirit and becomes an agent for the effectuation of the works of the divine.[3] In the processes of spiritualized actions the category of supreme significance is not the self-determining moral subject as stressed by T.H. Green, but the spiritual individual as essentially one with the divine spirit. According to Aurobindo the conquest of necessity is not effectuated by an intelligent cognition of the processes of material forces and the socio-economic reality as is stressed by modern science, but is a result of spiritual realization and a dynamic integral transmutation of the human consciousness.[4] Constant spiritual awareness is the real cause of the emergence of freedom in place of a mechanical cosmic necessity. Necessity is not conquered by the individual ego but by the spiritual individual who has achieved the fullness of divine realization and possibilities.[5]

[1] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 814. [2] Sri Aurobindo, *Superman*, p. 14.
[3] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, p. 37.
[4] Sri Aurobindo, *Collected Poems and Plays*, vol. I, p. 168:
"Through chemistry she seeks the source of life,
Nor knows the mighty laws she has found,
Are Nature's bye-laws merely, meant to ground
A grandiose freedom building peace by strife."
[5] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 772: "But in either case there would be, as the condi-

It is true that man is face to face with the spectre of death and division and limitation but he has to realize the cosmic in the individual. Man "is Brahman growing self-conscious in the objective multiplicity. He is the ego in the cosmos vindicating himself as the All and the Transcendent."[1] He represents the point at which the cosmic multiplicity "becomes consciously capable of (divine) turning and fulfilment".[2] Through the knowledge of the mutable multiplicity — *Avidya*, he eventually attains to the fullness and freedom of the supreme irrefragable spiritual being — *Vidya*. Self-realization or cosmic awareness is an imperative requirement for the conscious self if it is to transcend the demands of a mechanical blind necessity which, to the man of ignorance, appears to be the fundamental aspect of the cosmos. It is a happy portent that the age of subjectivism makes the idea of self-realization for the individual and even for the nation a conscious and pressing task.[3] Man has to make efforts for the realization of his spiritual destiny, which will bring him freedom. In one of his poems Aurobindo writes:

Therefore must Time
Still batter down the glory and form of youth
And animal magnificent strong ease,
To warn the earthward man that he is spirit
Dallying with transcience, nor by death he ends,
Not to the dumb warm mother's arms is bound
But called unborn into the unborn skies.[4]

Since man is in essence spirit,[5] he has to attain spiritual consciousness. Self-realization means the ever-present consciousness of the eternal freedom of the spirit. "Spirituality respects the freedom of the human soul, because it is in itself fulfilled by freedom; and the deepest meaning of freedom is to expand and

tion of a freedom from the control of a mechanical action of Nature-forces, a submission to a greater conscious Power or an acquiescent unity of the individual being with its intention and movement in his own and in the world's existence."

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *The Isha Upanishad*, p. 66; *The Life Divine*, vol. II, pp. 770-2.

[2] Sri Aurobindo, *The Isha Upanishad*, p. 73.

[3] *The Human Cycle*, p. 86.

[4] Sri Aurobindo, "Love and Death", *Collected Poems and Plays*, vol. I, p. 111.

[5] Sri Aurobindo, *The Future Poetry*, p. 373: "The soul of man, a many- motioned representative of the world-spirit."

grow towards perfection by the law of one's own nature, Dharma."[1] Spiritual freedom does not mean the assertion of the exaggerated claims of the vital ego, but it means "obedience to the Divine Truth in ourselves and our members and in all around us."[2] Obedience to the divine truth does not imply a mutilation and suppression of vital and aesthetic sensibilities or an exclusive isolation of the individual. The attainment of truth can come not by rejection and extinction of human will, feelings and aspirations but by a superior spiritual consciousness and a fullness of growth. Therefore spiritual freedom as obedience to divine truth means a willing subjection to the divine being. It postulates an aspiration for the source of light, immortality, bliss, freedom and power. The progressive growth of subjectivism will deepen this spiritual quest and longing.

The concept of spiritual freedom or self-realization implies the positive expansion and extension of the ordinary consciousness. This implies obedience to the laws of our spiritual being. One has to grow into self-fulfilment and to achieve not only the psychic integration of personality but also a moral balance and spiritual harmony with the environment. It is true that the struggle for liberty has often meant the egoistic assertion of the claims of one person over a group of persons, or of a group over the community as a whole. It is only natural in an unequal, irrational and egoistic social agglomeration. Hence there has been the growth of disorder, maladjustment, chaos and anarchy. "But these arise from the absence or defect of the sense of unity between individual and individual, between community and community."[3] Aurobindo's idea of freedom as obedience to the laws of our spiritual being postulates the growth of a communal fraternity and even of the accentuation of human feelings of sympathy, fellowship and kindness, because obedience to the laws of our being implies "a unity without limits for that is our real being". Freedom is the law of being in its illimitable unity, as the secret master of the cosmic procession. Freedom is necessary for the evolution of man's divine nature because it is an essential phase and mechanism in the manifestation of the secret purpose of the spirit. "... the truest order is that which is founded

[1] *The Human Cycle*, p. 224. [2] *The Human Cycle*, p. 320.
[3] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 184.

on the greatest possible liberty, for liberty is at once the condition of vigorous variation and the condition of self-finding."[1] The quest of distinct individuality leads to the growth of liberty, but this liberty which leads to the assertion of the spiritual claims of the autonomous personality is not rooted in the ego. It is something spiritual. Aurobindo says: "the liberty claimed by the struggling human mind for the individual is no mere egoistic challenge and revolt, however egoistically or with one-sided exaggeration and misapplication it may sometimes be advanced; it is the divine instinct within him, the law of the self, its claim to have room, and the one primary condition for its natural self-unfolding".[2] Hegel also has a similar conception of freedom: ". . . man is an object of existence in himself only in virtue of the Divine that is in him — that which was designated at the outset as *Reason*, which in view of its activity and power of self-determination was called freedom."[3]

The consummation of freedom, which is planted in man as a divine instinct, implies the deliverance from the animal elements and the progressive and deepening inward growth into spirituality.[4] The true crystallization of voluntaristic autonomy postulates not the assertion of a vital will but the pursuit of some great and fundamental ideal which has a Godward orientation. ". . . I may, by an intuition in my nature, an aspiration in my heart and a reason in my mind, put myself at the service of some strong ideal, some intelligent force that serves God with or without knowledge of Him. Then is my will a true will, it does its share; it leaves its quota, it returns to its Master with its talent used or increased."[5] This conception of progressive divinization by obedience to the laws of our inmost being which are the same as the laws of God would mean that ultimate freedom postulates the emergence of a divine self in man. He is opposed to the modern scientific attempt to explain the totality of a man's personality by sole reference to the mechanical operation

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 297.
[2] *The Human Cycle*, pp. 80-1.
[3] Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, p. 34.
[4] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 922, "As our only real freedom is the discovery and disengagement of the spiritual Reality within us, so our only means of true perfection is the sovereignty and self-effectuation of the spiritual Reality in all the elements of our nature."
[5] Sri Aurobindo, *The Superman*, p. 21.

of the laws of nature and the influences of heredity and environment. To Aurobindo this means the replacement of a spiritual cosmic teleology by an arbitrary predestination. It negates the conception of a freely acting and willing subject. Spirit alone can be free.[1] The blind feverish turbulence and violent clash of energy-stuff cannot generate the idea of freedom. Freedom is an essential attribute of the soul and not of the objectified material nature, and "where there is no soul there can be no freedom".[2] The human spirit alone can be free if it realizes the inward subliminal depths of its spiritual being. Engrossment in the quagmires of material and vital satisfactions leads to a neutralization and erosion of liberty. Man can find within himself the eternal sources of strength to master the alien character of a hostile social and natural environment if he controls the lower appetitive and vegetative part of his personality. If he restrains the Asura and the Rakshasa in his being, the divine spirit will shine in all its glory. Spiritual integration is the sole way for getting over the limitations of a finite, contingent and care-stricken world.

The conception of the freedom of the spirit, postulated by Aurobindo, is not the mere reiteration of the gospel of redemption from the sins and sorrows of the world as popularized in ancient religions and philosophies.[3] According to the integralist idealistic philosophy of Aurobindo, what apparently seem contradictory to the freedom and fullness of the spirit — death, disease, incapacity, limitation, evil and suffering — have also to find a rational meaning and justification in a spirituab theodicy.[4] An integral, comprehensive approach to spiritual freedom implies that even what appears to be a negation of freedom has to be logically explained and has to be shown to be necessary for the realization of self-consciousness by the spirit, through its apparent negations. The fullness of freedom implies the growth of an attitude of the spirit which views even the apparent negations of freedom as only partial and exclusive

[1] "Freedom, God, Immortality; the three
Are one and shall be realised at length,"
—Sri Aurobindo, *Collected Poems and Plays*, vol. I, p. 170.

[2] Sri Aurobindo, *The Superman*, p. 16.

[3] *The Synthesis of Yoga*, part one, p. 252: "Not liberation but perfection must be the aim of Karmayoga."

[4] *Essays on the Gita*, vol. II, p. 63.

concentrations of some divine force, and as being not totally alien.[1] The acquirement of this synthetic integral spiritual vision is the consequence of the attainment of a transcendent-cosmic consciousness through a spontaneous concentrated surrender to the divine power. "If we surrender our conscious will and allow it to be made one with the will of the Eternal, then and then only shall we attain to a true freedom; living in the divine liberty, we shall no longer cling to this shackled so-called free will, a puppet freedom, ignorant, illusory, relative, bound to the error of its own inadequate vital motives and mental figures."[2]

These Aurobindian conceptions of the divine instinct for liberty, "spirituality fulfilled by freedom," and liberty implying obedience to the laws of our being and laws of the divine power, have also their parallels in several other idealistic Indian thinkers. Vivekananda thought that freedom means the attainment of an attitude of equanimity towards all creatures; in this sense it is the foundation of all religious and ethical disciplines. This freedom does not imply the imposition of an external code or canon but is immanent in human nature itself, and is fulfilled by a spiritual quest and its realization. Such spiritual freedom can never be attained so long as man remains chained to the obscurity, perturbation and bewilderment of Maya. He has to become conscious of his real self by transcending his apparent self. Tagore also regards freedom as universal consciousness. According to him individual, social and political tragedies are the outcome of a limited view of truth, which means that the cycle of universal truth has not been completely comprehended. "That cycle finds its end when the individual realises the uni-

[1] *The Life Divine*, vol. I, pp. 69-70: "But the play and movement embodies itself in a multiplicity of forms, a variation of tendencies, an interplay of energies. Multiplicity permits of the interference of a determinative and temporarily deformative factor, the individual ego; and the nature of the ego is a self-limitation of consciousness by a willed ignorance of the rest of its play and its exclusive absorption in one form, one combination of tendencies, one field of the movement of energies. Ego is the factor which determines the reactions of error, sorrow, pain, evil, death; for it gives these values to movements which would otherwise be represented in their right relation to the one Existence, Bliss, Truth and Good. By recovering the right relation we may eliminate the ego-determined reactions, reducing them eventually to their true values; and this recovery can be effected by the right participation of the individual in the consciousness of the totality and in the consciousness of the transcendent which the totality represents."

[2] *The Synthesis of Yoga*, (Sri Aurobindo Library, Madras, 1948), Part One, p. 57.

versal and thus reaches freedom. . . this freedom is in truth itself and not in an appearance of it."[1] But while Tagore, Vivekananda and Aurobindo have interpreted freedom as an extension of the individual consciousness into cosmic and later into transcendent consciousness, K. C. Bhattacharya has conceived of freedom as a process of successive de-individualization. According to him: "I do not know myself as free but I conceive that I can be free successively as body from the perceived object, as presentation from the body, as feeling from presentation and as introspective function from feeling. Absolute freedom implies freedom even from the introspective individuality of the self."[2] Thus while Bhattacharya emphasizes de-individualization, Aurobindo lays the central emphasis on a surrender to the divine power. This stress on Godward surrender as the inevitable means to the realization of spiritual freedom shows the enormous influence of the Bhagavadgita on Aurobindian thought. Aurobindo's contribution lies in having reformulated for the secularist and scientific modern world the ancient gospel of spiritual freedom.[3]

[1] Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, p. 189.

[2] K.C. Bhattacharya, *The Subject as Freedom*, pp. 204-6.

[3] *Savitri*, "The House of the Spirit and the New Creation", Book III, Canto III, p. 314.

"O strong forerunner, I have heard thy cry.
One shall descend and break the iron Law,
Change Nature's doom by the lone Spirit's power.
A limitless Mind that can contain the world,
A sweet and violent heart of ardent calms
Moved by the passions of the gods shall come.
All mights and greatnesses shall join in her;
Beauty shall walk celestial on the earth,
Delight shall sleep in the cloud-net of her hair
And in her body as on his homing tree
Immortal Love shall beat his glorious wings.
A music of griefless things shall weave her charm;
The harps of the Perfect shall attune her voice,
The streams of Heaven shall murmur in her laugh,
Her lips shall be the honeycombs of God,
Her limbs his golden jars of ecstasy,
Her breasts the rapture-flowers of Paradise.
She shall bear Wisdom in her voiceless bosom,
Strength shall be with her like a conqueror's sword
And from her eyes the Eternal's bliss shall gaze.
A seed shall be sown in Death's tremendous hour,
A branch of heaven transplant to human soil;
Nature shall overleap her mortal step;
Fate shall be changed by an unchanging will."

(b) *Theory of Political Freedom*

As a metaphysician, Aurobindo has developed the concept of spiritual freedom. As a social and political thinker and leader, he drew political implications from this. He says that the notion of internal and spiritual freedom has been developed in the East, while the idea of social and political freedom is a legacy of the Western civilization. There have been several factors contributing to the growth of liberty as an ideal in the West.[1] Socrates and Plato developed the ethical conception of freedom and held that man is wicked only because he is ignorant. Socrates propounded the view that virtue is knowledge. Plato believed that people had freedom of choice.[2] The Greeks formulated the ideal of *Eleutheria*. As interpreted by Aristotle in his *Politics*, it implies the right of ruling and being ruled in turn. It also means freedom of social action. The Stoic idea of the fellowship and equality of man contributed to Western Civilization the notion of the moral nature of the individual. Christianity emphasized the idea of the spiritual personality of man. In the writings of Luther, Melanchthon, Calvin and Zwingly the ideal of individual conscience as the highest authority in religious matters was developed, as against the oecumenical pretensions of the infallibility of the Roman pontificate. The assertion of the idea of freedom of conscience in religious matters led to the growth of a philosophy of political resistance in the seventeenth century writers, and this idea of resistance to the constituted authority greatly contributed to the enrichment of the ideal of liberty. The growth of capitalism also was a notable factor in the evolution of the concept of liberty in a sociological context. There are two reasons for this. First, capitalism is based on the freedom of the labour contract. Surplus value and commodity production do not constitute the essence of the typological distinction of capitalism from the older economic systems of slavery and serfdom. The real distinguishing feature of capitalism is that it is based on the explicit division of labour-time and leisure-time. According to Karl Marx and Max

[1] I have incorporated here these five currents in the European philosophy of freedom for purpose of comparative study. Aurobindo himself does not discuss the history of these ideas of Western political thought.

[2] *Republic*, X, 617.

Weber, freedom of contract marks the rise of capitalism as a distinct system of economy. Capitalism accentuates the ideal of liberty by structuralizing the idea of contract. Secondly, capitalism is based on the unhindered freedom of economic action. This freedom was at first claimed against the impositions and restrictions of the old feudal economy which seriously curtailed economic mobility. Later on, this economic freedom implied freedom from any social or political restriction on economic activity. Capitalism led to the growth of economic individualism which found its clear theoretical justification in the writings of the Physiocrats and the British classical economists, and was defended by Spencer. The seventeenth century also witnessed the growth of the idea of political individualism consequent on the development of the theory of natural right. Natural right implies the necessity of an inalienable and indefeasible sector of individual right, immune from the encroachments of the state. To defend natural right some writers resorted to the device of the social and political contract. The theory of natural rights justified political revolution and sponsored the ideas of political individualism and the consensual theory of government. The slowly emerging democratic philosophy greatly profited from this idea and the notion that government is based on the consent of the governed became widely prevalent towards the latter part of the eighteenth century. Thus we can distinguish these five broad currents and philosophic movements in the evolution of the European concept of the political and social liberty of man — the Hellenic concept of *Eleutheria*, Stoicism, Christianity and Reformation, the capitalistic system of economy and the theory of natural rights and social contract.

Aurobindo points out that in Europe the ideal of external freedom is important, whereas in India the theory of inner freedom has been stressed. "They [the Europeans] have found out the way to external freedom. We have found out the way to internal freedom. We meet and give to each other what we have gained. We have learned from them to aspire after external as they will learn from us to aspire after internal freedom."[1] Sometimes patriotic Hindu leaders refuse to recog-

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, p. 115. The concept of inner freedom or spiritual freedom, referred to in the *Speeches* of Aurobindo has also been discussed in *The*

nize that the present-day emphasis on political liberty and democracy in India is due to the influence of Mazzini, Mill, Spencer and the ideas of the French Revolution on Indian political thought. They would trace the idea of political liberty in modern Indian thought to the influence of the Vedantic concept of *Moksha*. But although the Vedantic idea of *Moksha* implies freedom from bondage to empirical mundane phenomena, it was not given any political connotation in the older days. Even when in recent times people have begun to speak of political *Moksha* it has meant reading into the Vedanta ideas derived from Western politics. Unless one can show that the ancient and medieval teachers of Vedantic philosophy like Yajnavalkya, Uddalaka, Samkara or Vachaspati had in mind the political implications of *Moksha*, it cannot be asserted that India has developed indigenously the concept of political liberty. Certain scholars in India argue that if we did not have the concept of political liberty, how did Chandragupta or Kharvela or the Guptas attain national immortality by repulsing the foreign barbarians? Of course, in this broad sense of liberty as patriotism, ancient and medieval India did have the idea of political liberty. But that concept of liberty mainly implied the substitution of a national or local power in place of the rule of the foreigners, while in modern democracy the stress is laid on the notion of individual and personal liberty against governmental power and constraint. Liberty as conceived in the modern West does not have reference merely to the repulsion of foreign invaders but it means preservation of the autonomy of individual action from governmental interference.[1]

Human Cycle, pp. 273, 319-20, and in the *Essays on the Gita*, vol. I. pp. 230-1.

[1] "The Libertie, whereof there is so frequent, and honourable mention, in the Histories, and Philosophy of the Ancient Greeks, and Romans, and in the writings, and discourse of those that from them have received all their learning in the Politiques, is not the Libertie of Particular men; but the Libertie of the Common-wealth: which is the same with that, which every man then should have, if there were no Civil Laws, nor Common-wealth at all. And the effects of it also be the same. For as amongst masterless men, there is perpetual war, of every man against his neighbour; no inheritance, to transmit to the Son, nor to expect from the Father; no propriety of Goods, or Lands; no security, but a full and absolute Libertie in every Particular man; So in States, and Common-wealths not dependent on one another, every Common-wealth, (not every man) has an absolute Libertie, to doe what it shall judge (that is to say, what that Man, or Assemblie that representeth it, shall judge) most conducing to their benefit. But with all, they live in the condition of a perpetual war, and upon the confines of battle, with their frontiers armed, and canons planted against their neighbours

If the attainment of liberty means only the expulsion of foreigners, then Charles Martel and not Locke and Rousseau would be the prophet of modern democratic liberty in the West. Aurobindo is not unmindful of the significance of the sentiments of fraternity, fellow-feeling and equality as expressed in Christianity, Islam and Hinduism, but he candidly and frankly says: "still we learned from them (the Europeans) to strive after political equality and in return for what they have given us we shall lead them to the secret of the equality within."[1] I believe that political liberty in the sense of anti-foreignism existed in ancient and medieval India, but political liberty in the sense of democratic individualism is an importation from the West. The Western orientation is towards the "deed" and hence in the West there is the conception of liberty of action.[2] In India the emphasis has been on spiritual freedom or divine liberty obtained by self-realization and cosmic experience. "Indian civilisation," Aurobindo says, "did not develop its earlier political and social liberties — that greatness of freedom belongs to the West — but freedom of thought and spiritual liberty have always been among its constant tradition."[3] It is perhaps true that Western thought and culture have not put as great an emphasis on spiritual self-realization as the Indian, although Christian writers like Romain Rolland, Albert Schweitzer, Arnold Toynbee and Nicolas Berdyaev[4] would deny this broad typologization. But nevertheless it is true that more than the mystic ideas of Pythagoras, Plato, St. Paul and St. Francis, the scientific orientations of Aristotle, Newton and Darwin have influenced the Western attitude towards life, intellect and

round about. The *Athenians*, and *Romanes* were free; that is, free Commonwealth: not that any particular men had the Libertie to resist their own Representative; but that their Representative had the Libertie to resist, or invade other people. There is written on the Turrets of the city of *Luca* in great characters at this day, the world *Libertas*; yet no man can thence inferre, that a particular man has more Libertie, or Immunitie from the service of the Commonwealth there, than in *Constantinople*. Whether a Common-wealth be Monarchicale, or Popular, the Freedome is still the same." (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter XXI, Everyman Edition, pp. 182-3.)

[1] *Speeches*, p. 117.

[2] *Aravinda Mandira Me* (In Hindi), p. 18.

[3] Sri Aurobindo, "A Defense of Indian Culture", reproduced from *The Arya* in The *Advent*, 1949 p. 89.

[4] R. Rolland, *The Life of Vivekananda*; A. Schweitzer, *Indian Thought and its Development*; A. Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial*; N. Berdyaev, *The Meaning of History*.

nature. Although in Luther and Kant also we have specific distinctions between external, or outer, and inner freedom, still in broad fundamentals I think that the distinction made by Aurobindo between the external social and political freedom of the West and the internal spiritual freedom in India is correct.

Related to this distinction between external and internal freedom is the distinction made by Aurobindo and other Indian political thinkers between *Swaraj* and *Swadhinata* — political independence.[1] Swaraj is an ancient Vedic concept and although in the Vedas it had a political connotation, in the Upanishads it acquired a metaphysical meaning and signified the state of one who had obtained mastery over self and passions and had conquered the divine kingdom. According to Aurobindo, Swaraj is the organization of national self-help and national self-dependence but it is more than a mere "organisation of the independent life of the country into centres of strength which grow out of its conditions and answer to its needs, so as to make a single and organic whole". It does not merely mean the fulfilment of a separate national existence but it also implies spiritual freedom and mastery and the attainment of spiritual bliss. Political independence or Swadhinata is only a part of integral Swaraj. Thus we can say that while independence is a political concept, Swaraj is a political - metaphysical concept. Bipin Chandra Pal also makes a similar distinction. Gandhi says: "The root meaning of Swaraj is self-rule. Swaraj may, therefore, be rendered as disciplined rule from within. . . The word swaraj is a sacred word, a Vedic word, meaning self-rule and self-restraint, and not freedom from all restraint which independence often means."[2] Indian writers of the idealistic school emphasize that liberty does not imply libertarianism but it means discipline and restraint over egoistic passions and assertions and a progressive identification with the interests of the collectivity. According to Aurobindo, the perfect human order can be realized not by imperfect unregenerate individuals but only by the collective efforts of individuals who have realized inner freedom or moral Swaraj.

According to Aurobindo only a spiritual supra-rational

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *Dharma Aur Jatiyata* (in Hindi), p. 98.
[2] M. Desai, *With Gandhiji in Ceylon*, p. 93.

enlightenment can bring perfect order and harmony in the world. He thinks that inner freedom will also lead to material and political success. He holds that inner freedom leads to outer freedom. "The first thing that a nation must do is to realise the true freedom that is within us and it is only when you understand that free within is free without, you will be really free. It is for this reason that we preach the gospel of unqualified Swaraj."[1] According to him not consciousness and bliss alone are divine values but also force and power. Power is an integral and essential element in the constitution of the spiritual reality and therefore spirituality can and does provide the necessary dynamic impetus and strength even for material success. According to the old teachings of Kanada, Dharma is that which leads both to material success and transmundane happiness. Aurobindo is thoroughly convinced that spirituality will bring the fullness "to man's seeking for political and social perfection and to all his other powers and aspirations".[2] During his days as a prophet of nationalism he exhorted his countrymen to win back this inner Swaraj before the outer kingdom could be conquered. The supreme creative spiritual energy of the world dwells in the inmost hearts of men and "she waits for worship that she may give strength. . . . Recover the source of strength in yourselves and all else will be added to you, social soundness, intellectual pre-eminence, political freedom, the mastery of human thought, the hegemony of the world."[3]

This notion that inner spiritual freedom[4] will lead also to political freedom and glory in the external sphere, has been an important element in modern Indian political thought. It is a part of that broad intellectual movement in modern India which I call the "Secularization of the Vedanta." In modern India the political implications of old metaphysical Vedantic concepts have been stressed. Gandhi constantly emphasized the need of ethical purity for political success. Vivekananda considered the teachings of the Vedanta as essential even for the social and material realization of India's mission. In Tagore's writings is found the idea that social and political

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, p. 46.
[2] *The Human Cycle*, p. 225.
[3] *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, pp. 7-8.
[4] *The Human Cycle*, p. 273.

insignificance are the consequences of inadequate spiritual consciousness;"... in the social and political field, the lack of freedom is based upon the spirit of alienation, on the imperfect realisation of the one. There our bondage is in the tortured link of union.... it is true that in the human world only a perfect arrangement of interdependence gives rise to freedom... The history of the growth of freedom is the history of the perfection of human relationship."[1] But while Tagore and Aurobindo think that spiritual inward consciousness leads to political freedom, Tilak argues the other way and asserts that political freedom is necessary for spiritual growth. "Swaraj is a life centred in self and dependent upon self. There is Swaraj in this world as well as in the world hereafter... It is my conviction, it is my thesis that Swaraj in the life to come cannot be the reward of a people who have not enjoyed it in this world."[2]

In the ancient religions and philosophies of the East the primary object of quest was emancipation from the transitory and painful phenomena of the world. In the modern history of the Western peoples the orientation is towards political and social freedom. Aurobindo pleads for both inner and outer freedom. He wants that the freedom of man within as well as without should be vindicated. Inner freedom is necessary for individuals because it leads to the acquisition of divine power; therefore Aurobindo formulated his conception of inner Swaraj. He says: "Christ said to the disciples who expected a material kingdom on the spot, 'The kingdom of heaven is within you.' To them too he might say, 'The kingdom of Swaraj is within you.' Let them win and keep that kingdom of Swaraj, the sense of the national separateness and individuality, the faith in its greatness and future, the feeling of God within ourselves and in the nation, the determination to devote every thought and action to his service."[3] But Aurobindo would not be satisfied only with inner freedom. Although external freedom is a vain thing without inward perfection, still to "pursue an inner liberty and perpetuate an outer slavery" is also a narrow

[1] Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, p. 188.
[2] B.G. Tilak, *Speeches and Writings*, pp. 245-6.
[3] Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, p. 87.

ideal[1] and hence both inner and outer freedom have to be acquired. Inner freedom does not imply merely the pursuit of morally autonomous self-determined will and action but it also signifies spiritual growth. Outer freedom means not only the expulsion of foreigners from the country but also the organization of national life on independent lines. Aurobindo pleads for the synthesis of outer and inner freedom. To the extent that he thinks the life of inner freedom and external bondage to be incompatible he represents a very healthy and vigorous ideal. This ideal of the synthesis of spiritual freedom and political freedom is more worthy of pursuit than the ideal advocated by some thinkers who would lay the emphasis only on spiritual freedom and would relegate the fight for political freedom to the realm of lower empirical phenomena.

(c) *Theory of Rights*

Aurobindo's ideal of the synthesis of outer and inner freedom necessitates the analysis of the question of the relationship between the individual and the society, and the individual and the state. This question touches the fundamental problem of the dynamics of power and liberty. For Aurobindo the individual is a formation of the spirit. He regards the society and the community also as formations of the spiritual reality. But he thinks that since the collectivity can obtain perfection only through individuals, the individual is the key to the evolutionary movement. The individual always remains the focal point in the political and spiritual philosophy of Aurobindo.[2] The perfection of the society has its foundational postulate in the perfection of the individual. Rights are essential for the realization of individual perfection. The assertion of individual rights is not an example of mere egoistic excess but is the concrete expression of the divine instinct of liberty. Rights are those principles which make the objectivization of the processes and means of individual self-development and collective perfection possible."... that again is our right because it is necessary to the development of the world and the fulfilment of the destiny of mankind."[3]

[1] *Evolution*, p. 31. [2] *The Human Cycle*, p. 86. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 83.

Aurobindo follows an intermediate course between the two extreme conceptions — the notion of inalienable rights against the society and the theory that rights are conferred on the individual by the society or the state. Rights according to his view are claimed for the full development of the individual and the society.[1] According to Gandhi a person who observes truth and non-violence wins prestige, and prestige brings rights, and these rights are exercised not against the society but for its service. Gandhi emphasizes that the assertion of rights and counter-rights to the extreme is the cause of the present-day troubles in the world, and he says that the true source of right is duty. Gandhi thinks that the right to perform one's duties is the only right worth living for. According to Fichte and Hegel there can be no right against the state.[2] Aurobindo would emphatically repudiate this view of German idealism. He accepts that the individual has rights against the state.[3] Mazzini lays the emphasis on duties and not on rights. Modern Indian writers on political thought like Gandhi and Aurobindo, who emphasize the sociological implications of the concept of the *Svadharma* of the Gita, tend to argue in the Mazzinian line in laying the fundamental stress on duties. Thus it is that we do not find the use of the concept of natural right in the theoretical substantiation of the Indian demand for independence. Tilak spoke of Swaraj as the birth-right of a nation but there is no developed and systematic formulation of natural right in the writings of Tilak, Gokhale, Aurobindo, Pal, Gandhi or Tagore. It is true that the traditional religious and cultural pattern of India has emphasized the performance of one's duties. Perhaps one possible reason for the absence of the concept of natural right as a theoretical support of Indian nationalism and independence has been that when Indian nationalism began to develop, the concept of natural right had ceased to be important in the Western tradition because of the systematic attacks against it led by Hume, Hegel and Bentham. As a political theoretician,

[1] Aurobindo does recognize that modern democracies have tried to guarantee three "great fundamental liberties"—freedom of speech, of thought and of association. He is very critical of the attempts of totalitarian states to suppress individual right. *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 292-3.

[2] Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* (Oxford ed.), pp. 39, 71, 157, 186.

[3] Aurobindo's entire philosophy of passive resistance is built on this theory.

Aurobindo would repudiate both the Lockean and the Hegelian theories of right. He accepts the sociology of *Svadharma* as enunciated by the Bhagavadgita.

(*d*) *Freedom and Spiritual Individualism*

The importance that Aurobindo attaches to the individual in his political philosophy stems from his view that the free individual can be the medium of social progress. The communal mass is always conservative and slow in its movement and operations. "The free individual is the conscious progressive: it is only when he is able to impart his own creative and mobile consciousness to the mass that a progressive society becomes possible."[1] In the present condition of humanity the danger is not from an exaggerated individualism but from the possibility that the society may over-assert its portentous claims. The heavy, unenlightened, mechanical weight of the social mass and multitude has led to the suppression and coercion of the individual in several countries. Aurobindo points out that the suppression of the individual is a danger to social and political advancement. The conscious growth of the individual towards progressive enlightenment is a more readily accomplishable possibility than the education of the mass because the latter is "still obscure, half-conscious, ruled by universal forces that escape its mastery and its knowledge".[2] The ancient cultures laid the greatest stress not only on the cohesiveness and proper organization of the community, but also enshrined the ideal of the enlightened and comprehensive perfection of the individual. In ancient India the ideal of the spiritually conscious individual had a prominent place, but society also was regarded as being of extreme importance. The individual had to pass through it and under its socializing and moulding influences for the attainment of true social consciousness and altruistic fraternity, which formed the prelude to self-realization and an unhindered spiritual existence. Under the influence of ancient Indian political and metaphysical thought

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 295.
[2] *The Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 182.

Aurobindo formulates the ideal of spiritual individualism.[1] The social movement needs the assistance and leadership of individuals to become conscious. In general, the mass consciousness is always less evolved than the consciousness of the most developed individuals. The mass or the collectivity can develop and progress only through the individuals who have evolved morally and spiritually.

But the spiritual individualism of Aurobindo also leads to the formulation of the philosophy of eventual transcendence of social and political obligations. The growth of spiritual consciousness is tantamount to the growth of a power and force and personality which have an imperative claim to being recognized and respected. In the philosophy of spiritual individualism are implicit the claims of the superiority of truth to any social or political obligations. But the transcendence of social and political obligations for the sake of truth applies only to the gnostic or spiritual individual and not to the commonplace empirical individual. Aurobindo says: "*The individual does not owe his ultimate allegiance either to the state which is a machine or to the community which is a part of life and not the whole of life*: his allegiance must be to the Truth, the self, the spirit, the Divine which is in him and in all; not to subordinate, or lose himself in the mass, but to find and express that truth of being in himself and help the community and humanity in its seeking for its own truth and fullness of being must be the real object of existence."[2] The achievement of spiritual consciousness is dependent upon the endeavours of man to attain the ultimate truth. By stressing the theory of the transcendence of social and political claims Aurobindo pleads for a spiritual anarchism. But he will never plead for the transcendence of social and

[1] *Essays on the Gita,* vol. I pp. 169-70: "The Indian social tendency has been to subordinate the individual to the claims of society, but Indian religious thought and spiritual seeking have been always loftily individualistic in their aims. An Indian system of thought like the Gita's cannot possibly fail to put first the development of the individual, the highest need of the individual, his claim to discover and exercise his largest spiritual freedom, greatness, splendour, royalty, —his aim to develop into the illumined seer and king in the spiritual sense of seerdom and kingship, which was the first great charter of the ideal humanity promulgated by the ancient Vedic sages. To exceed himself was their goal for the individual, not by losing all his personal aims in the aims of an organised human society, but by enlarging, heightening, aggrandising himself into the consciousness of the Godhead."

[2] *The Life Divine,* vol. II, p. 921. Our italics.

political obligations by any and every empirical individual. Only a person who has voluntarily and spontaneously accepted the ideal of the determination of his conduct by spiritual norms can claim to go beyond the authoritarian bounds of the society and the state. Thus the transcendence of socio-political claims is dependent upon and proportionate to the development of spiritual consciousness. Every empirical individual cannot claim that autonomy and indemnity. Aurobindo emphatically states: "So long as he is undeveloped, he has to subordinate in many ways his undeveloped self to whatever is greater than it."

But spiritual advancement involving the eventual transcendence of political obligations does not mean an isolation from the lives of others. Spiritual freedom does not imply a life entirely separate from cosmic and social existence. Spiritual freedom leads to the growth of a sense of spiritual oneness and solidarity with all living beings. According to the Gita, the pursuit of the good of others becomes the nature of the realized spiritual being. But the spiritual individual is always conscious of the superiority of the spiritual imperative and the realization of his self cannot be complete through the social collectivities only, be they spiritually conceived as Fichte thinks or be they ethical concretizations as Bosanquet opines. The spiritual awareness leading to spiritual oneness harmonizes the claims of true individualism and true collectivism in the integral consciousness of the divine reality. Hence Aurobindo says: "The gnostic being will not accept the mind's ideals and standards, *he will not be moved to live for himself, for his ego, or for humanity or for others or for the community or for the state*, for he will be aware of something greater than these half-truths, of the Divine Reality, and it is for that he will live, for its will in himself and in all, in a spirit of large universality, in the light of the will of the Transcendence. For the same reason there can be no conflict between self-affirmation and altruism in the gnostic life, for the self of the gnostic being is one with the self of all,—no conflict between the ideal of individualism and the collective ideal, for both are terms of a greater Reality and only in so far as either expresses the Reality or their fulfilment serves the will of the Reality, can they have a value for his spirit. But at the same

time what is true in the mental ideals and dimly figured in them will be fulfilled in his existence; for while his consciousness exceeds the human values so that he cannot substitute mankind or the community or the state and others or himself for God, the affirmation of the Divine in himself and a sense of the Divine in others and the sense of oneness with humanity, with all other beings, with all the world because of the Divine in them and a lead towards a greater and better affirmation of the growing Reality in them will be part of his life action."[1]

This idea of spiritual identity-consciousness and the transcendence of the obligations and laws of the community and the state by the gnostic individual is based upon the idea of the superiority of the spirit and its claims. Political and social claims even in their highly moralized and mentalized form belong to the domain of the terrestrial world. The human spirit on the other hand represents potentially the fullness of the divine reality itself. According to Aurobindo the claims of the spirit should have precedence over the claims of those collectivities that belong to the realm of the world. Aurobindo considers that the state is only a machine and he will not agree with Othmar Spann that any assertion of the claims of individual liberty will lead to spiritual under-development.

There are significant differences in the conception of the individual in Aurobindo and German idealism. Western idealism, especially in Germany, emphasized the spiritual nature of individual consciousness and the subject was conceived of as a spiritually creative being. Consciousness of individual spirituality was regarded as a moment in the inward self-unfoldment of the spirit. The concept of the individual in its broad political and universal aspects was emphasized in the nineteenth century German idealistic thought. But it was always the idea of the individual in the process of expanding himself and linking himself to other individuals and groups and moral entities. The empirical individual qua individual was not free but became free through a process of growth. This view did not imply any elimination of social and political ties. According to the European idealists the empirical individual as such is an abstraction. Only the socialized and moralized

[1] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, pp. 939-40, our italics.

individual is a spiritual being. According to Aurobindo, on the other hand, the individual is the becoming of the spirit and the transendentally-oriented spiritual individual not only achieves an identification in inner consciousness with all living beings, their minds and feelings and aspirations, but sees them all as diverse and multiple becomings of the same reality. Such a person goes beyond the claims and persistent obligations of the community and the state. In Western political idealism such an ideal of the transcendence of political obligations never existed.

Political individualism in Western thought preached the contractual nature of political obligations. It championed the right of the individuals to think for themselves and to assert their personality. The political individualism of Locke was partly based upon scientific individualism. Scientific individualism regarded all men as equally amenable to the operation of physical laws. It tended to treat man's social and psychological propensities as scientifically cognizable quantities, with the possibility of qualitative differences being treated quantitatively. The Western political individualists accepted that social and political associations were the means through which the individual realized those wants which he experienced before the formation of those associations. Aurobindo also stresses the great historical necessity of the social collectivity. He thoroughly emphasized the fulfilment of its claims and obligations by the spiritually unregenerate individuals. He only preaches the superiority of the claims of truth to the claims of the community and the state for the spiritual individual who has realized gnostic consciousness.

There are important differences however, between Aurobindo's political philosophy and the political and moral individualism of the West. Aurobindo never accepts the idea of the fulfilment of the demands of the ego.[1] His views are radically different from those of Epicurus. At whatsoever

[1] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 866: "His liberty of action is not a license to act upon wrong will or the impulsions of the Ignorance, for that too would be alien to his being, a restriction and diminution of it, not a liberation. A drive for fulfilment of falsehood or wrong will would be felt by him, not as a movement towards freedom, but as a violence done to the liberty of the spirit, an invasion and imposition, an inroad upon his supernature, a tyranny of some alien Nature."

level it may be, he preaches the transcendence of the ego and asserts that until a man is relieved from the influence of the vital titan within himself he cannot enjoy inner freedom. Aurobindo is also not an individualist in the sense of emphasizing the self-sufficiency of the individual.

Moreover, the psychological hedonism and associationism which were associated with the rise of individualism in the thought of Hobbes, Priestley, Bentham and James Mill are not found in Aurobindo. Aurobindo advocates an ethical doctrine beyond hedonism, sensationalism and utilitarianism. He preaches a subordination of sensuous living for the sake of spiritual realization. Religious individualism in the West, originating from some of the teachings of Christ in the Bible, emphasizes the spiritual value of the individual. The religious individualists like the Anabaptists, the Independents and the Quakers wanted to sever all connexion between religion and politics and preached religious equality. Aurobindo was a firm believer in religious equality and he believed that according to one's own inner make-up and psychological orientation one should progress in the religious path. But while the sixteenth and seventeenth century religious teachers in Europe accepted the sanctity of individual conscience, and preached political resistance if the claims of conscience were suppressed by the political authority, Aurobindo has always laid the emphasis on the spirit or Atman—conscience according to him being only a socially or ethically rationalized conventional concept. Moreover, while some political individualists in the West believe in the nominalistic concept of society and regard the state and law as necessary evils, Aurobindo holds that the society also has a sub-soul. He holds that the community is a formation of the spiritual reality, and rejects the political individualism of Spencer and in his own practical programmes tends to accept a socialist social ideal. While the political individualists thought in terms of the assertion of the claims of the individual against the state, Aurobindo accepted the notion of harmony between the individual and the state for his ideal society. But in the imperfect world, Aurobindo like the individualists, would like to fight for the legitimate rights of the individual against the state. When Aurobindo was a political leader in the days of

the anti-partition agitation (1905-1910) he advocated passive resistance against the unjust laws and decrees and ordinances of the government.

In the modern world there is a conflict between the authoritarian claims of the omnipotent state, which not only demands the voluntary submission of the individual to it but almost his complete self-immolation, and the claims of the individual and his conscience and personality.[1] According to Aurobindo, all this conflict is generated by "a groping of the mental ignorance of man seeking to find its way and grasping different sides of the truth but unable by its want of integrality in knowledge to harmonise them together. A unifying and harmonising knowledge can alone find the way."[2] The ideal society, says Aurobindo, is characterized by a respect for individual liberty and free growth and a simultaneous respect "for the needs, efficiency, solidarity, natural growth and organic perfection of the corporate being, the society or nation".[3] The threats to liberty arise from asserting the claims of the individual against those of his fellows. But if "a real, a spiritual and psychological unity were effectuated",[4] individuals would harmonize their own claims with the growth of fellow beings. Thereby not only would human unity become a concrete reality but a perfect society would also come into being. The liberty of the individual is necessary not only for the growth of his moral and political personality but also for the world, because only by being his true and real self can the individual help the growth of other beings and groups.[5] The spiritual society of the future will acknowledge the claims of individual freedom. "A large liberty will be the law of a spiritual society and the increase of freedom a sign of the growth of human society towards the possibility of true spiritualization."[6] The vital problem in politics is the reconciliation of power and liberty. The history of the Western world in the last five centuries is a record of the persistent attempts to reconcile the respective claims of political authority and personal liberty. The tragic failure of all attempts in this direction both at the theoretical and at the

[1] "The Problem of Uniformity and Liberty", *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 158-72.
[2] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 919. [3] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 146.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 184. [5] *The Human Cycle*, p. 283. [6] *Ibid.*

practical institutional level is anticipated in Rousseau's statement that man is born free but is everywhere in chains. According to Aurobindo political and institutional changes can only be palliatives. There is the necessity for the revelation of the inner all-transforming spiritual consciousness. "Perhaps liberty and equality, liberty and authority, liberty and organised efficiency can never be quite satisfactorily reconciled so long as man individual and aggregate, lives by egoism, so long as he cannot undergo a great spiritual and psychological change and rise beyond mere communal association to . . . the ideal of fraternity, or, less sentimentally and more truly expressed, an inner oneness. That no mechanism . . . has ever created or can create; it must take birth in the soul and rise from hidden and divine depths within."[1] Aurobindo's solution for the perpetual conflict between power and liberty is a spiritual transformation of mankind.[2] At the merely sociological level, Aurobindo thinks that the solution of the problem of power and liberty becomes difficult because the human mind, a product of ignorance, thinks in terms of the categories of contraries, discords and disparates and it does not have the vision of an integralizing knowledge. He says that the European world could not achieve a simultaneous reconciliation of liberty, equality and brotherhood. The pursuit of liberty resulted in individualistic democracy, the pursuit of equality led to governmental communism, and the pursuit of brotherhood led to the theory of anarchism. Aurobindo propounds the synthesis at a higher level. By a spiritual transformation both external political freedom and a balanced spiritual equanimity can be achieved. Thus ultimately the consummation of a better humanity would be possible. The ethical and psychological problem of freedom of will can also be solved by the consummation of spiritual transformation, because the descent of supramental consciousness means the achievement of self-determination of will and action out of the plenitudes of a sovereign, comprehensive all-vision and self-vision. It will be a self-determination by a

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 130.

[2] In *The Life Divine* Aurobindo discusses the triple transformation—the psychic transformation, the spiritual transformation and the supramental transformation. We have sometimes used the term spiritual transformation in a comprehensive sense to iuclude the triple transformation.

plenary all-embracing knowledge-force, and not merely by the impure empirical will which often is impelled and goaded by ignorance.

(*e*) *Freedom and Equality*

At the purely political level, liberty and equality are difficult to harmonize. Aurobindo says: "Freedom, equality brotherhood are three godheads of the soul; they cannot be really achieved through the external machinery of society or by man so long as he lives only in the individual and the communal ego. When the ego claims liberty, it arrives at competitive individualism. When it asserts equality, it arrives first at strife, then at an attempt to ignore the variations of Nature, and as the sole way of doing that successfully, it constructs an artificial and machine-made society. A society that pursues liberty as its ideal is unable to achieve equality, a society that aims at equality will be obliged to sacrifice liberty."[1]

The antithetical character of liberty and equality has also been referred to by Acton and Ruggeiro. According to Acton, political liberty is a worthy ideal which democracy seeks to destroy by preaching a sameness and identity that run counter to the essence of liberty, which is qualitative individuality. Ruggeiro also refers to the hierarchical and selective, and hence non-equalitarian, character of liberty. Acton and Ruggeiro represent the reactions of a conservative constitutionalism against the democratic extension of the opportunities for political and social participation to the masses. They represent the traditions of Locke and Burke who favoured constitutionalism but not democracy. But they forget the logic of historical evolution in the West. Giddings rightly points out that in the West movements for liberty started against the restraints of excessive absolutism and centralized unification. Movements for equality were reactions against the confinement of liberty to a privileged group. The concept of equality pointed in the direction of the extension of the notion of liberty. Since the middle of the nineteenth century even the concept of political equality has been considered inadequate, and suggestions

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 368.

and demands have been made for a substantial degree of economic equality in order to create the circumstances and conditions which can make possible the genuine and thorough exercise of political equality. Democratic socialism has tried to combine the ideas of political liberty and socio-economic equality. Aurobindo is quite right in thinking that so far liberty and equality have not been reconciled. But he is not opposed to their reconciliation, unlike the aristocrats and the advocates of the bourgeoisie.[1]

But the solution that Aurobindo prescribes is not on the empirical level as that of Rousseau or the democratic socialists. He thinks that a purely political and institutional solution would not work. The solution of politics lies in metapolitics. He says: "The union of liberty and equality can only be achieved by the power of human brotherhood and it cannot be founded on anything else . . . when the soul claims freedom, it is the freedom of its self-development, the self-development of the divine in man in all his being. When it claims equality, what it is claiming is that freedom equally for all and the recognition of the same soul, the same godhead in all human beings . . . freedom, equality, and unity are the eternal attributes of the spirit."[2] Aurobindo thinks the hidden power of the human soul has to be discovered for the real integration of freedom and equality. Only then can a spiritual society be built which would show equal consideration to the claims and demands of the individual and the group. An attempt at the mere rational solution of the problem would not do. Rational justice progressively adjusting itself to the needs and demands of the times has been considered to be the solution of the problem by several European sociologists. Max Weber thinks that freedom depends upon the certainty of predictability and understandability in generalized terms. He maintains that only the growth of highly rationalized types of action can procure freedom. Aurobindo would not deny the services of

[1] Aurobindo had hoped that "a just social order" reconciling liberty and justice could be established if the "ideal of free cooperation guided and helped by a wise and liberal central authority expressing the common will" could be actualized. But the evolution of world political institutionalism took a different direction. See *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 129-30.

[2] "The Religion of Humanity", *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 368-9.

reason. He thinks that socialism and democracy represent the ideal of the conscious use of reason for social purposes. He would like mankind to proceed from the irrational stage of social action to the rational stage. But unlike the European sociologists, Aurobindo would not consider a highly rationalized society to be the climax of human perfection. Beyond the province of reason he would make ventures to the suprarational heights. He would not, however, be immersed, in the higher regions like a spiritual mystic, but would like to make available the forces of spirit for social and political transformation. To this extent there is a fundamental similarity between Plato and Aurobindo.

(*f*) *Law and Freedom*

In ancient civilizations law was supposed to be the revelation of divine will. We find this idea in the Hindu notion of Dharma and in the Thomistic conception of eternal and divine law. Sometimes the ancients thought of law as the command of pristine law-givers like Moses, Hammurabi, Solon, Lycurgus, Manu and others. The Marxists conceive of law as a juristic expression of the interests of dominant social groups based on the forces of production. Law according to Marx is only a mechanism to register the will of the ruling group. Hobbes and Austin propounded the view that law is the command of a definite political superior. Recently we find the introduction of an idealistic teleological element in law, especially in the legal philosophy of neo-Kantianism of Rudolf Stammler. Aurobindo does not construct any new theory of law like von Jhering, Kohler, Kelsen or Pound but he makes some observations on the problem of law with references to its bearings on liberty.[1]

In a sense law and regimentation indicate the imperfect state of human society because they represent the seeking of an external aid to solve social and political problems. The defect of law is that it aims to regulate society on mechanical and artificial patterns. But overstandardization and a rigid unifor-

[1] "Nature's Law in Our Progress—Unity in Diversity, Law and Liberty", *The Ideal of Human Unity*, Chap. XVII.

mity crush "nature's initiative and habit of intuitive self-adaptation".[1] Aurobindo follows the realistic and sociological method in analyzing the sources of the power of law. Hegel and Kohler try to interpret law as the objectification of some mystic will of the nation. But Aurobindo is opposed to seeing in law any majestic or mystic power. According to him there are two bases for the authority of law. First, the "strong interest of the majority or of a dominant minority or the community as a whole in maintaining it".[2] This view emphasizes the sociological aspect of legal obedience. Law answers to the needs either of a dominant group or of the majority or of the community. It is not an abstract mechanism to be imposed and maintained without reference to the interests of the social groups or of the society as a whole. To this extent Aurobindo's view is based on a historical and sociological appraisal of the evolution and nature of law. But he does not advocate the exaggerated view that law and justice are only the rationalizations of the demands and interests of the dominant social and economic groups. The second foundation of law is based on the monopolistic possession of the instruments of coercion by the law-enforcing agency. "The metaphorical sword of justice can only act because there is a real sword behind it to enforce its decrees and penalties against the rebel and the dissident."[3] This reference to the monopolistic possession of the engines of coercion by the law-enforcing unit, as a foundation of the power of law, shows the positivistic orientation of Aurobindo. But Aurobindo minimizes the importance of elements of rationality and universality involved in law, which impart to it an intrinsic force for commanding obedience. Law, to elicit the obedience of enlightened citizens, has to be based on a generalized rational approach. To the extent that it introduces the empirical force of undue subservience to local and sectional interests, it invites rebellions and resistance.

Aurobindo distinguishes three stages in the evolution of law.[4] First, the stage of unwritten or partly written system, e.g. decretals, precedents, etc. In this early epoch there is nothing like the Roman *lex*, but only a number of binding social

[1] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 184-5. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 141.
[3] *Ibid.* [4] *Ibid.*, pp. 221-2.

regulations, "*nomoi, mores, achare*". They control almost the whole sphere of life and there is no distinction between social, religious and political law. Secondly, the stage represented by systematic institutes which, although they maintain the strict form of legal codification, are really "only an ossification of custom and help to stereotype the life of the society and not to rationalise it".[1] Thirdly, the stage of the deliberately ordered codes which are an attempt at intelligent legal systematization. In this stage a sovereign authority establishes the law code. This is the stage of what is called positive law in Europe, which became very fashionable after the French Revolution and the rise of Benthamism. Even in Germany, Thibaut raised the cry for positive law on the French pattern, against the historical school of Savigny.

Aurobindo pleads for the use of the legal mechanism for safeguarding liberty. Law is to be a set of principles which will create the system for the preservation, and not the suppression, of liberty. He says: "Human society progresses really and vitally in proportion as law becomes the child of freedom, it will reach perfection when man having learned to know and become spiritually one with his fellow man, the spontaneous law of his society exists only as outward mould of his self-governed liberty".[2] This conception of law as the child of freedom shows that although Aurobindo has made a sociological and positive analysis of the sources of legal obedience he is never a positivist himself, like Austin. He remains a moral teacher and at the highest level a spiritual prophet smarting at the restrictions of law. He says: "Better anarchy than the long continuance of a law which is not our own or which our real nature cannot assimilate. And all repressive or preventive law is only a makeshift, a substitute for the true law which must develop from within and be not a check on liberty, but its outward image and visible expression."[3] In the ultimate stage Aurobindo wants the replacement of the coercive mechanism of law. Eventually law should become a crystallization and manifestation of an inwardly imposed system of discipline. In the perfect spiritualized society the basis of social and political

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 222.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 185.
[3] *Ibid.*

regulation should be the inner light and the regenerated insight of the human soul. Aurobindo says: "The works of life right themselves, escape from confusion, substitute for the artificial or legal order imposed by the intellect and for the arbitrary rule of desire the guidance of the soul's inner insight, enter into the profound paths of the spirit."[1] Spiritual growth implies the transcendence of the external and mechanical legal code by the voluntary laws of inner governance. Only thus can freedom and law be reconciled.

(g) *The Concept of Freedom in Idealistic Philosophy*

Freedom is a cardinal concept in idealistic political thought. Aristotle emphasized the concept of *Eleutheria* or freedom. He stressed the necessity of freedom of choice in moral action. Kant conceived of a moral reason and pleaded for its autonomy and self-determination. Hegel emphasized concrete freedom as institutionalized in social and political collectivities. In Indian political and metaphysical thought we find emphasis on freedom, especially on spiritual freedom. The notion of making law the child and image of divine liberty, formulated by Aurobindo, shows the influence of Vedantic philosophy which emphasizes that the basic goal of man is to transcend partial and egoistic standpoints and realize the spiritual being. Yet the way in which Aurobindo states his conclusions has unmistakable Western parallels. Aurobindo's view of freedom as obedience to the laws of one's being is a reconciliation of the views of Rousseau and the Bhagavadgita. Rousseau distinguishes four types of liberty— the natural liberty of the pre-contractual society; the civil liberty limited by the general will; moral liberty and philosophical liberty. His conception of moral liberty is relevant to our discussion. Rousseau says: ". . . moral liberty, which alone makes him truly master of himself, for the mere impulse of appetite is slavery, for obedience to a law which we prescribe for ourselves is liberty."[2] Rousseau follows the Christian tendency in European thought of defining freedom in terms of obedience. This led him to assert the paradoxical

[1] *The Synthesis of Yoga*, vol. I, p. 160.
[2] Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (Everyman edition), p. 16.

and ominous conclusion that even in being coerced by the general will the individual was really free, only he did not know his truly general will. Rousseau's phraseology in defining freedom as obedience was later borrowed by Bosanquet. Aurobindo sometimes defines freedom as obedience to divine laws and sometimes as obedience to the laws of one's being. The latter conclusion refers to the classical concept of *Svadharma* as defined and analyzed in the Bhagavadgita. According to the Gita, the persistent pursuance of the course of action oriented to one's social and psychological structure and make-up leads to the attainment of emancipation and God-realization. Perhaps Aurobindo got the general tendency of conceptualizing freedom in terms of obedience from Western idealistic political thought and especially Rousseau, and the concept of *Svadharma* he got from the Gita. Out of the fusion of both came his conception of freedom as obedience to the laws of our being.

Aurobindo differentiates the notions of *Sattvic* freedom and *Trigunatita* as found in the Bhagavadgita, from the Stoic concept of freedom.[1] While the Stoics emphasize *Rajasik* struggle, passionlessness and resignation, Aurobindo's theory of spiritual freedom implies also divinized activity but without local and partial attachments.

There are some further similarities and contrasts between Aurobindo and Western political idealism. Both Aurobindo and Kant are agreed that the individual is to be treated not as a means but as an end. But in Aurobindo the emphasis is always on the cosmically-transcendentally-oriented spiritual individual, and not on the moral individual as in Kant. Both Kant and Aurobindo accept that there should be a universalistic motivation in human conduct. Aurobindo would go a step further than Kant and say that beyond the universal lies the transcendent and man has so to act as to achieve ultimate identity even with that supreme being. But while Kant exalted the supreme worth of freely-willed action proceeding from the sense of duty — *Aus Pflicht* — Aurobindo treats ethics as only a stage in human evolution. In Aurobindo's view the fully integrated spiritual individual is never ethical by a deliberate effort, but good flows out from his being and nature. While the central

[1] *Essays on the Gita,* vol. I, (Calcutta, 1949), pp. 236-45. *The Human Cycle,* p. 108.

point in Kantian ethics is the categorical imperative and the good will, in Aurobindo it is the supramental gnosis. Kant tends to favour an ascetic ethics. But to Aurobindo inner spiritual freedom means not a suppression of all feelings by will but their determination by a supreme all-awareness and world-awareness. In Kant ethical freedom consists in being determined by the moral will. In Aurobindo inner freedom lies in obeying the law of God.

Both Aurobindo and Hegel are agreed in conceiving of freedom as the essence of the spirit. But in Hegel there is an apotheosis of the state. According to Hegel, "the state in and by itself is the ethical whole, the actualisation of freedom". But Aurobindo considers the state as only a machine and a contrivance. Aurobindo, when he refers to Europe having contributed the idea of external political freedom to India, has in mind the idea of freedom popularized in Western constitutional political thought, as in Locke, Burke and Mill. He does not refer to the German etatistic conception of political freedom. Hegel conceives of freedom as positive self-determination by the state which is the architectonic of reason. The will is determined by the object but the object also is determined by the will and to this extent there is self-determination. There is the conception of an organized and coherent system of ends in the Hegelian theory of freedom of will. Social and political collectivities are the objectivizations of moral ends. The state is the highest point in this system. This conception of freedom Hegel thought was absent in the Asiatic world. India and China, according to him, were entirely wanting in the subjective consciousness of the Idea of Freedom. ". . . in the Indian doctrine of the renunciation of the sensuality of desires and earthly interests, positive moral freedom is not the object and the end, but the annihilation of consciousness — spiritual and even physical privation of life."[1] But Aurobindo would seriously refute this Hegelian view because he holds that India has to teach Europe the conception of inner spiritual freedom. He believes that in the Vedanta there is a higher conception of spiritual freedom than in Christianity.

As Aurobindo speaks of freedom as obedience to the laws

[1] Hegel's *Philosophy of History*, p. 71.

"of one's being" — the *Svadharma*, F. H. Bradley refers to "My Station and Its Duties". But Bradley's ethics teaches authoritarianism. Bradley conceives of society as a moral organism and wants man to perform his duties without any sceptical questioning. One is free to choose his vocation but not to determine the duties pertaining to that vocation. But Aurobindo always pleads for a comprehensive conception of liberty. Even when he conceives of the society as an organism he always leaves room for stressing the supreme importance of the spiritual individual. Bradley almost analytically reduces the personality of the individual to be a result of the different impressions and influences cast by different elements in the physical and social environment.[1] Aurobindo always upholds the unique spiritual essence of the individual. Thus, both at the political and the metaphysical levels, there is a far greater stress on the concept of individual freedom in Aurobindo than in Bradley.

Bosanquet differentiates between a man's apparent will and his real will. A man is morally free when his actions conform to his real will. The real will is the general will and the state is the full concretization of general will. Aurobindo would be opposed to such an idealization of the state. He accepts a fundamental distinction between the state and society. According to Bosanquet a man is morally free when he is master of his transient passions and his false will. Aurobindo also thinks that progressive approximation to divine liberty amounts to the suppression of the demon in man and the growth into divine life. There is remarkable similarity in the way Bosanquet and Aurobindo phrase their conceptions about freedom. Liberty in the philosophical sense, according to Bosanquet, means "being oneself in the fullest sense".[2] Aurobindo says: "By liberty, we mean the freedom to obey the law of our being, to grow to our natural self-fulfilment." But as regards the concrete social and political implications of their ideas, while Bosanquet insists on participation in the social and political institutions conceived as ethical units, Aurobindo thinks that the real sociological freedom of man consists in the performance of *Svadharma* — one's own duties. Bosanquet minimizes the importance of

[1] F.H. Bradley, *Ethical Studies*, pp. 171-2.

[2] B. Bosanquet, *The Philosophical Theory of the State* (London, 1931), ppl 3.6-9.

individual freedom by conceiving the state as the operative criticism of institutions and as being in its nature essentially force. Like Hegel, he represents the state as the culmination of rationality at the social and political level. Although he refers to moral and philosophical freedom, the general trend of his writings is to aggrandize the social and political whole. But even when Aurobindo regards the society as a unit with a sub-soul, the stress on the freedom of the individual both at the sociological and the philosophical levels is fundamental in his thought.[1]

While there are some individualistic trends in Western political idealism as in Kant, McTaggart and some of the thinkers belonging to the school of personalism, fundamentally Western idealism has tended to stress the superiority of the social collectivity to the individual, and therefore it conceives of freedom as obedience either to the laws of the *polis* or the state or the institutions. Aurobindo has a far greater consciousness of the spiritual nature of the individual; he never preaches the complete political and social subordination of the individual either to the society or to the state. He advocates a comprehensive synthesis of external political freedom and inner moral and spiritual freedom. To this extent his ideas represent a great contribution not only to Indian thought but to world political thought.

9. CONCLUSION

Aurobindo's political thought has some special merits. It emphasizes the importance of the inner freedom of the human spirit. In modern democratic countries there is a great demand for freedom of action. But before there can be a real freedom

[1] The "personalist" emphasis is stronger in Aurobindo than in Bosanquet. The latter stresses merging with the whole. Bosanquet, unlike Aurobindo, never regarded the individual as utterly and completely divine in its essence. While Bosanquet emphasizes moulding by the society and the rational contemplation of art, religion and philosophy, Aurobindo stresses a spiritual transfiguration of the human being and the cosmos. Bosanquet quotes with approval the Kantian maxim of "the free will which wills the free will". But according to Aurobindo will is an aspect of nature and hence the freedom of the will is not the highest conception. It is imperative to unmask the egoistic will and personality and become aware of the autonomy of the divinized self. As a nationalist leader Aurobindo has been much more interested in the problem of self-government than Bosanquet.

of action the creative intelligence and dynamic spirit of the individual have to be set free. Aurobindo is quite justified in supplementing the demand for political freedom with the quest for spiritual freedom. So far, the fundamental trend in the political philosophy of the idealistic schools in Europe, especially in its Hegelian forms, has been to emphasize the realizability of freedom in and through the state. Although Aurobindo creates the metaphysics of an integral supramental Real-Idealism, in his political philosophy, unlike the Hegelian idealists, he underlines the central importance, dignity and divine essence of the individual. The emphasis on the predominant worth of the spiritual individual is his fundamental contribution to the political philosophy of idealism. His political thought is a great antidote to Hegelianism.

Another contribution of Aurobindo — and of other Indian political thinkers like Gandhi and Pal — is the distinction between moral Swaraj and political independence. Mere political freedom from alien rule would not solve the problems of man. The forces of greed, lust and barbarity are corrupting social and political institutions; Gandhi and Aurobindo have shown their prophetic vision in stating that political independence should be supplemented with an inner Swaraj — self-conscious mastery over one's lower passions. Aurobindo has pleaded for a synthesis of external and inner freedom. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle also taught that political power receives its justification only if used for the maximization of virtue. St. Augustine wanted the incorporation of justice in the *res publica.* In the modern world, when there is too much vital struggle for existence and an aggravated form of national egoism and chauvinism is emerging, the emphasis on moral Swaraj in place of political independence is a signal contribution to the political philosophy of mankind.

Aurobindo, as also Tagore, Vivekananda and Gandhi, are justified in preaching the creative autonomy and divine value of the individual. This philosophy of spiritual individualism teaches the repudiation of psychological egoism. Tagore and Aurobindo stress the significance of the spiritual individual but they also emphasize the organic conception of society. It may be pointed out that Aurobindo preaches the transcen-

dence of political obligations and this amounts to advocating the subversion of the political structure. But one can point out that this transcendence of social and political obligations which he advocates applies only to the individual who has attained spiritual realization and whose sole obligation is to the supreme truth and reality. It is not applicable to the vast numbers of unregenerate individuals. In his enthusiasm for spiritual individualism and even spiritualized anarchism Aurobindo does not neglect the socializing role of the state. Without denying the aggressive, despotic and brutal tendencies of the state in several countries, nobody can be unmindful of the fact that the state has also been responsible for fostering a sense of common public good, and it has also been partly contributing to the growth of morality by giving individuals a training in ego-transcending civic and social activities. Hence Aurobindo regards the state as the product of reason. The growth of the state means the replacement of instinctive and infra-rational methods of social and political action by regularized and formalized techniques. The role of the state in the social evolution of humanity cannot be minimized. But although Aurobindo is careful to note the significance of the state in the transition from infra-rational stages of social evolution, he has been cautious not to conceive of the state as the objectification of divine reason or as the crystallized embodiment of freedom.

The central point in Aurobindo's political philosophy is the conception of freedom. The supreme emphasis on liberty in modern politics and philosophy has come as a reaction against the institutions and patterns of an exploitationist and authoritarian society. There has been a fight not only against the instruments of constraint but against the very principle of power itself, as in modern anarchism. Aurobindo's criticisms of democracy and socialism mainly refer to their neglect of freedom. He visualizes the advent of a spiritualized society for the sake of attaining integral freedom. But there are values other than freedom. Freedom is not the only goal of human progression and evolutionary endeavour. Today political liberty has to be supplemented by freedoms from want, material insecurity and the constant fear of alien destructive social and political forces. The Gita concept of spiritual equanimity (*Samatva*) and imper-

sonal equality and the Stoic concept of freedom are meant for the philosophers and would not solve the concrete and immediate problems of the masses. There is the imperative necessity of securing for mankind at large, those resources of nature and society which can enable it not only to participate in and enjoy the advantages of the heritage of human culture and civilization but to realize its creative spiritualism by its freely willed contributions to human advancement and progress. Hence Aurobindo has pleaded for a spiritual synthesis of liberty, equality, unity, peace and fraternity. Although a Yogi and a spiritualist, he does not inculcate the sociology of abnegation and scarcity. He would like to have 'a simply rich and beautiful life' for all. He refuses to neglect the social and political problems of man. He has been a revolutionary fighter for India's freedom and a hostile critic of capitalist imperialism. His plea for the spiritual synthesis of individualism and communism has implicit in it the ideal of the reconciliation of social, economic and political liberty. There is, however, in the writings of Aurobindo supreme emphasis only on moral and spiritual freedom. But it is unfair not to lay the same degree of stress on social and economic freedom. It is true that Aurobindo has referred to economic justice but he has not laid the necessary emphasis on it. In the context of the dire poverty and misery of the vast populations of Asia and Africa, social and economic justice is the imperative need of the hour. The mystic and the intellectual may have the need of moral and spiritual freedom but the common man is in quest of more mundane values. The creative freedom of the spirit should be expressed not only by some esoteric, mystic process of cosmic and transcendental consciousness, leading to the descent of some metapolitical and metasocial dynamism, but it should be realized also in the planning of a free, intelligent, prosperous and just society.

Aurobindo is trenchant in his condemnation of the inadequacies of modern socio-economic ultimates. He pleads for a supramental transformation of man as the only real and lasting solution. He stresses the psychological remaking of man. He will not place sole reliance on the change of political institutions. Democracy and socialism will not bring the millenium unless the spiritual element is incorporated in them. Aurobindo

emphasizes the necessity of spiritual metapolitics to solve the problems of politics. His scepticism regarding modern political institutions and his stress on the spiritualization of political life and action remind us of Plato's plea for the rule of the philosopher trained in the metaphysical dialectic of the Idea of Good. Aurobindo's suggestion about the imperative necessity of a total supramental transmutation for the true and perfect realization of liberty, equality and fraternity may not have immediate political repercussions on a collective scale. But like the vision of Plato it will continue to inspire intellectuals.

CHAPTER FIVE

IDEALISTIC AND UTOPIAN ELEMENTS IN SRI AUROBINDO'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

1. THE EVOLUTIONARY CRISIS AND THE SPIRITUAL DESTINY OF MAN

Ours is an epoch of transition and crisis. Mankind is faced with the possibility of the extinction of the cultural achievements of several centuries. The colossal catastrophes heaped upon humanity in the last fifty years have rudely shaken the complacence of man. Gone is the belief in the concept of pre-established harmony, propounded by Leibniz and Smith. Instead of harmony there is waste, maladjustment and terrific competition. There exists the threat even of total collapse, destruction and annihilation. There is widespread nervous tension, anxiety and fear on account of the devastating dimensions of the instruments of annihilation. Thinkers in the Western world as well as in India have been grimly aware of the impending tragedy. In 1908 Gandhi called attention to the 'diseased' character of modern civilization.[1] Vivekananda and Tagore were aware of flaws in Western patterns of social and political organization. Spengler, shaken by the terror of the Agadir crisis of 1911 and the First World War, began examining the foundations of modern civilization and foretold the decline of the Western world which had entered the final stage of its cultural exhaustion — the stage of civilization.[2] Sorokin prophesied the end of the six hundred year old sensate civilization of the West and its replacement by rational-idealistic and intuitional-ideational patterns.[3] Toynbee regards human civilization to be on trial.[4] Thinkers and philosophers in all parts of the world are aware of a great impending chaos, though they differ with regard to their diagnosis and their prescription for survival.

According to Aurobindo, mankind has arrived at the crisis

[1] Mahatma Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*.
[2] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Preface to the first edition of vol. I.
[3] P.A. Sorokin, *The Crisis of Our Age*.
[4] Arnold J. Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial* (Oxford, 1948).

of its destiny.[1] The critical moments of human civilization are generated not by mere social and political factors but by vast cosmic forces. The crisis in human civilization, according to Aurobindo, is only a symptom of the cosmic crisis. In the course of universal evolution from the inconscience, there has been the emergence of matter, life and mind. But these categories are not adequate. There is the need of a higher power — the supermind.[2] In the terrestrial sphere this new power has yet to be felt. The present day crisis is only an indication of the insufficiency of our vital and intellectual instruments to deal with nature and society. The spiritualization of politics, economics and sociology has to be achieved. There is need for a new race of men and a new supramentalized humanity.[3] Aurobindo is aware of the several alternative solutions proposed for the present day crisis, but he points out their inadequacies.

2. INADEQUATE ALTERNATIVES

(*a*) *The Rationalized Society: Democracy, Communism and Socialism*

One inadequate solution would be the concept of a rationalized society. The concept of increasing rationalization we find in Max Weber, Karl Mannheim, John Dewey and others. Weber was a liberal, Dewey wanted to modify liberalism, while Mannheim was a social democrat. They believe that a conscious and deliberate growth of free human intelligence could be used to plan a better society. But Aurobindo thinks a perfect society cannot be built merely by reason. "A purely rational society could not come into being, if it could be born, either could not live or would sterilise and petrify human existence."[4] The main function of the human intellect, so far, has been a

[1] *The Life Divine,* vol. II, pp. 925, 933.

[2] *Bulletin of Physical Education,* (Sri Aurobindo Ashrama, Pondichery), November, 1951, p. 2: There are three layers of the supermind corresponding to the three activities of the intuitive mind. (*a*) Interpretative supermind represents the change of intuition into its supramental value, (*b*) Representative supermind is the supramentalized value of inspiration and (*c*) Imperative supermind corresponds to revelation. The supermind represents a unitarian, integralizing and harmonic consciousness.

[3] *The Ideal of Human Unity,* p. 17: "Our destiny may be the conversion of an original animal association into a community of the gods."

[4] *The Human Cycle,* p. 149.

dispassionate accumulation of knowledge and its utilization for the planning of a more sophisticated and comfortable life. But rational knowledge has betrayed the faith in it. It has investigated, analyzed and dissected, but it has not given any dynamic fervour to a better organization of society.[1] Aurobindo pleads for a light higher than that of human reason.[2] Because the rational intellectual man does not represent the acme of human possibilities, a society built by him would not comprise all the possible aspects of planned collective living.[3] It is necessary that the logical reason of man be supplemented by higher faculties and ultimately transmuted by them. Aurobindo does not negate the ideal of rationalization, but he will not be satisfied without a refounding of life on the basis of the hidden divine element.[4] He wants the concretization of the kingdom of the spirit on earth. "Beyond man's long intellectual effort towards a perfected culture and a rational society there opens the old religious and spiritual ideal — the hope of the kingdom of heaven within us and the city of God upon earth."[5] He does not plead for a suppression of art, science and life but wants their transformation into living symbols of a higher and more perfect life.[6] The new race of man is not to discard the vast achievements of science but is to use them for the sake of a better future. But Aurobindo does not accept the sufficiency of scientific knowledge.[7] Science cannot find the whole truth even about the processes and dynamics of phenomena, and it leaves the question of the supreme foundational principle and rationale of all things as dubious as before.[8] Therefore Aurobindo advocates searching for the integral supramental knowledge[9]

[1] According to Aurobindo, dynamic concepts such as Nietzsche's will-to-live and Bergson's exaltation of intuition above intellect, are subversive of any "premature typal order of economic rationalism". *The Human Cycle*, p. 24.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 101.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 138.

[4] *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Part One, p. 156.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 153.

[6] *The Synthesis of Yoga*, vol. I, p. 115.

[7] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 438:— A supraphysical knowledge is necessary for the completion of physical knowledge.

[8] Sri Aurobindo, *The Riddle of This World*, pp. 42-44.

[9] The dawn of integral knowledge would mean the cancellation of the sevenfold ignorance—(*a*) the original ignorance, (*b*) the cosmic ignorance, (*c*) the egoistic ignorance, (*d*) the temporal ignorance, (*e*) the psychological ignorance, (*f*) the constitutional ignorance and (*g*) the practical ignorance. See *The Life Divine*, vol. II, pp. 415-43, "Reality and the Integral Knowledge".

which he believes to be a higher type of knowledge than the formulations of a materialistic empirical science.[1] The scientific abstractions and generalizations regarding segments and diverse sectors of the cosmic process will receive their philosophic consummation in the plenary, unitarian awareness of the spiritualized being. Hence Aurobindo points out the hollowness of three political solutions — democracy, communism and socialism — which want a better and more intensive use of scientific knowledge.

Aurobindo examines first the "rational and scientific formula of the vitalistic and materialistic human being and his life, a search for a perfected economic society and the democratic cultus of the average man".[2] He considers this solution prescribed by political representative democracy to be inadequate because it cannot realize the ideals of unity, mutuality and harmony for the common life. There is an over-standardization in the process of effectuation of these ideals because of the suppression of individual diversities. There is the danger of the exclusion of other competing thought-structures in this system. Furthermore there are chances of the replacement of the individual ego by the communal ego. Aurobindo does not think that this solution will suit mankind.

Another solution is the use of materialistic reason and "a unified organisation of the economic life of the race".[3] Aurobindo thinks that this method, advocated by totalitarian communism, also has its dangers. It is based on "a forced compression and imposed unanimity of mind and life and a mechanical organisation of the communal existence".[4] There is the danger that this ideology can lead to a suppression of individual freedom. Perhaps the eventual consequence of this kind of ideology, if put to practice, would be "the efficient stablity of a termite civilisation or a drying up of the springs of life and a swift or slow decadance".[5] There are certainly some dangers implicit in the exaggerated assertions of the egoistic human mind and its claims to growth, but these cannot be properly removed by bureaucratic suppression. The proper way to eliminate them

[1] *The Human Cycle*, vol. p. 101.
[2] *The Life Divine*, II, p. 928.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 929.
[4] *Ibid.* [5] *Ibid.*

would be the voluntary growth of the individual into a greater and larger consciousness.

A third variant of the materialistic scientific and rational solution of the problems of society is the socialist solution, "the development of an enlightened reason and will of the normal man consenting to a new socialised life in which he will subordinate his ego for the sake of the right arrangement of the life of the community".[1] The socialist formula relies on two methods for bringing about this consummation. First, there is an emphasis on the growth of education. It wants to impart to the public more adequate and useful information and knowledge. Secondly, it relies on the agency of a new social machinery. For Aurobindo this solution is insufficient because although a better system of education can provide more information it cannot change the nature of man. So long as man continues to be his unregenerate vital self, the solution will continue to be ephemeral. The institutional mechanism of socialism is insufficient because external machinery of any kind can only lead to a mechanical regulation and not to the inward growth of man. Sole reliance on external institutionalism can lead to over-standardization, coercion and compression and that would be the path to eventual decadance and loss of the progressive springs of growth. The real solution is to discover the hidden depths of the soul and replace the disorder and ignorance of nature by the plenary resplendent knowledge-power of the soul which is divine in essence. Aurobindo is opposed to a mere mechanized socialism because "there would be little room and freedom for such a movement of self-discovery and self-effectuation in a closely regulated and mechanised social existence".[2]

Thus we see that Aurobindo's fundamental objection to the "perfected economic society and the democratic cultus of the average man", to the "unified organisation of the economic life of the race" and to "a new socialised life" is based on the tendency of these solutions to over-emphasize the power of mechanical reason, science and political-economic institutional devices. He pleads for diversity and freedom and he thinks that these three above-mentioned systems lead respectively to the

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 930.
[2] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 920.

assertion of the communal ego, to the mechanical compression of life, or to coercion. There are various difficulties in the political working of these solutions, which Aurobindo points out in his books *The Ideal of Human Unity* and *The Human Cycle*, and which have been analyzed in the previous chapter. But the basic objection is the same in all cases — the loss of the freedom of the individual. Any effective organization of the scientific and rational resources of man tends to emphasize efficiency, order and success at the cost of individual initiative and diversity. Aurobindo would advocate a system which reconciles individual diversity and communal order. But this synthesis cannot be concretely realized unless higher powers have been discovered and used. Mental reason by itself is powerless to plan a system which can harmonize freedom and order. Therefore he wants the attainment of supramental powers.

(*b*) *The League of Nations and the United Nations*

Sometimes an institutional approach is suggested as the remedy, and some political scientists would say that if only we could have a parliament of man or a political federation of mankind we could solve our problems. Aurobindo is convinced that institutional devices would not carry us very far because behind institutions are the men who run them, and the political creations of imperfect men are also bound to be imperfect. With reference to the inadequacy of the League of Nations he said: "No faltering mechanisms which have the appearance but not the truth of freedom will help us; the new structure, however imposing, will only become another prison and compel a fresh struggle for liberation. The only safety for man lies in learning to live from within outwards, not depending on institutions and machinery to perfect him, but out of his growing inner perfection availing to shape a more perfect form and frame of life; for by the inwardness we shall best be able to see the truth of the high things which we now only speak with our lips and form into intellectual constructions, and to apply their truth sincerely to all our outward living."[1] But he is only against regarding

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *War and Self-Determination.* Aurobindo characterized the League of Nations as a "remarkably ill-jointed, stumbling and hesitating machine".

these institutional set-ups as providing the perfect solution. He wants them to be utilized to the extent they can help man.

With reference to the solution of the existing political problems he says: "A successful accommodation (between Russian communism and American capitalism) would demand the creation of a body in which all questions of possible dispute could be solved as they arose without any breaking out of open conflict, and this would be a successor of the League of Nations and the U.N.O. and move in the same direction. As Russia and America, in spite of the constant opposition of policy and ideology, have avoided so far any step that would make the preservation of the U.N.O.[1] too difficult or impossible, this third body would be preserved by the same necessity or imperative utility of its continued existence."[2] But as a mystic Aurobindo would not consider the institutional device of the organization of nations to be sufficient, but emphasizes the transformation of man as the real solution. However perfect, institutions are after all the creations of the at present imperfect man, and at best they can be temporary expedients and cannot realize the divine kingdom and the spiritualized society which is the imperative final destiny of man.[3]

(*c*) *Humanism*

Sometimes it is said that humanism would provide the solution of social and political ills. Humanism was a specific product of the Renaissance rationalism and was directed against the theological world - view of the Middle Ages. It reached the climax of its development in the seventeenth, eighteenth and

Ibid., p. 1. He lamented the absence in the League of Nations of a "charter of the international rights and duties of the peoples". *Ibid.*, p. 69. But although Aurobindo prescribed some institutional devices to modify the defects of the League he believed that "the golden age of a true communal living" could be founded only on a spiritual law of inner freedom and unity. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

[1] Aurobindo, (*The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 384-5.) criticized the oligarchical nature of the United Nations indicated by the preponderant place given to the five great powers in the Security Council. He is also hostile to the device of the veto. He says: "they have done more to create trouble, hamper the action and diminish the success of the new institution than anything else in its make-up or the way of action forced upon it by the world situation. . . ."

[2] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 397-8.

[3] Sri Aurobindo, *War and Self-Determination*, p. 31.

early nineteenth centuries.[1] The central tenet of humanism was to teach the moral worth and creative power of the individual human being. Against the fantastic amorphous theological abstractions, humanism extolled the creative powers of the human being. Distinguished from the medieval theocentric outlook, humanism was anthropocentric and secular. Its development was a function of scientific growth.

For Aurobindo humanism and humanitarianism are not adequate solutions.[2] He considers them to be vain efforts of the sentimental idealist at synthetic eclecticism.[3] Humanism glorifies the empirical man. The earliest founder of European humanism, Protagoras, said: "Man is the measure of all things." Aurobindo is not satisfied with the glorification of the empirical man, be it even at the highest level of his scientific and political development. Instead, he wants the supramental transmutation of the human being and his nature. Not the empirically developed being but the transformed gnostic man, according to him, can solve the problems of man and society. It is essential to exceed and transmute and not only to extend and enlarge the human consciousness. Transmutation alone can be the source of inexhaustible creative resplendence. He says: "When we have passed beyond humanity, then we shall be the man .... In a word, godhead; to remake ourselves in the divine image."[4]

In recent European thought there has been a vulgarization and debasement of humanism. To Nietzsche man was an infamous thing to be transcended by the superman. To Spengler man is only a beast of prey, and Trotsky calls man a tailless ape. While Spengler and Trotsky demean the stature and dignity of man and almost preach a reversion to beastiality, Aurobindo preaches a divine transformation.

(*d*) *Ethical Idealism*

Sometimes it is said that ethical idealism or rational good

[1] Herder, *Letters on Humanity*; Lessing, *Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts*.

[2] Sri Aurobindo, *The Riddle of This World*, p. 41; *Thoughts and Glimpses*, pp. 4, 8. Radhakrishnan in *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (Oxford, 1940), p. 354, also refers to the "failure of a self-sufficient humanism".

[3] *The Riddle of This World*, p. 41.

[4] Sri Aurobindo, *Thoughts and Glimpses*, pp. 4, 8.

would provide the solution of the problems of man and society. According to Aurobindo the ethical solution is also inadequate.[1] It is true that ethics has performed great services in the evolution of the human race. It has tried to limit and sometimes to neutralize the operations and activities of the devil in man. But it cannot provide the ultimate solution, which can only be a fundamental super-psychological transfiguration of man and his entrance into the cosmic width of the spiritual life. Ethical idealism is at best the moralized form of social regulation but after all, it is the product only of mental ignorance or mental half-knowledge. Hence the true solution cannot be ethical.

There are four main standards of human conduct in an ascending scale.[2] First, personal need, preference and desire. Secondly, a social altruism and an emphasis on the good of the community. Thirdly, an ethical idealism.[3] But beyond these ethical standards Aurobindo pleads for the higher or the fourth standard—the divine law. He is never tired of condemning the incapacity of the moral mind which mistakes moral idealism for spirituality. This confusion, according to him, springs from inadequate psychological knowledge, which fails to distinguish between mind and spirit and mistakes the refined productions of the ethical mind for spiritual knowledge.[4] Mind, says Aurobindo, is only an inferior formulation of the spirit and by itself can neither unravel the secrets of the cosmos nor prescribe the formulas for the perfect society.

Aurobindo is very critical of the hedonistic and sociological theories of ethics.[5] The hedonistic formula exalts only the achievement of sensational satisfactions. The sociological theory of ethics considers ethical formulas to be generated from "the social sense and a ruled direction of the social impulses."[6] The sociological theory, I would like to point out, has been supplemented in modern times by anthropological researches which have strengthened the theory of ethical relativism by

[1] *The Synthesis of Yoga*, vol. I, p. 106.
[2] *The Synthesis of Yoga*, vol. I, p. 177.
[3] According to Aurobindo, the *Chaitya Purusha* points us towards truth and right, beauty, love and harmony.
[4] *The Riddle of This World*, p. 46.
[5] *The Human Cycle*, p. 183. [6] *Ibid.*

showing the diversity of ethical criteria and standards in different social aggregates. Aurobindo is opposed to the various criteria of moral action which have been prevalent in Western and Indian ethical thought. He crticizes the attempt of the ethical idealist who "selects a fundamental principle of conduct essentially unsound and constructed by the intellect, utility, hedonism, reason, intuitive conscience or any other generalised standard. All such attempts are foredoomed to failure."[1] Aurobindo pleads for going beyond ethics. There should be realization of the complexity of the spirit [2] whose ways of action cannot be completely comprehended by any single moral principle.[3]

But although Aurobindo preaches the transcendence of ethics he never implies the annihilation of the ethical standard. He firmly asserts that the ethical sense of right proceeds from divine intuition in man.[4] The real categorical imperative comes from within. He is pleading not for the constructed social and moral standard of the average moralist but for the spiritual criterion of social action. The spiritual man is moral not out of the fear of social conventions and public opinion, but moral action becomes a part of his nature. He "obeys the inner ideal, not an understanding; he answers to a divine law in his being, not to a social claim or a collective necessity. The ethical imperative comes not from around but from within him and above him."[5] Aurobindo wants not the negation but the divine fulfilment of ethics. A divine life would be based not on the partial social, historical and pragmatic canons of the divergent ethical systems of the world but would be the concrete fulfilment and culmination of the essential and inner moral truth of life which has been stressed in all the scriptures of mankind.

The inadequacy of ethics has been hinted at also by Bergson.

[1] *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Part I, p. 189.

[2] *Ibid.* Aurobindo in *The Human Cycle*, p. 301, pleads for a transformation of mental idealism into spiritual realism.

[3] *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Part I, p. 150: "The Life-force is like a dog's tail,—for straighten it ever so much by force of ethics, religion, reason or any other redemptive effort, it returns in the end always to the crooked curl of nature." Hence Aurobindo pleads for the spiritual transmutation.

[4] *The Human Cycle*, p. 183.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 186.

Beyond the "closed morality" which is narrow and incomprehensive, Bergson refers to the "open morality", the morality based on the superior intuitional orientation and vision of the mystic which can generate a genuine love for mankind.[1] Ramakrishna and Vivekananda also hinted at the insufficiency of a social ethic for spiritual realization. Mahatma Gandhi synthesized ethics with a spiritual metaphysics in his concept of truth being not only a moral element in life and society but identical with the fundamental being of the spiritual reality. He used to say that truth is God. All these attempts to transcend ethics are based upon the desire only to annihilate the egoistic self-gratification which is produced by an ethical pursuit being ethical merely for social recognition.[2] Truly ethical conduct comes from a transmutation of our narrow limited consciousness into the divine consciousness. Ethics, according to Aurobindo and Vivekananda, is based on the dualistic and pluralistic assumption of the moral agent being separate from the beings with reference to whom he is practising ethical conduct. They want the achievement of a sense of identity with the spiritual absolute. This identity-consciousness would naturally result in the realization of a sense of identity with the inmost essence of all living creatures. This implies the permeation of the spiritual indvidual's being with an overpowering sense of universal good. This would mean not the deliberate performance of moral action involving effort and strain, but the outflow of moral action from the very nature and being of the spiritual individual.

(*e*) *Religious Theology*

Sometimes a return to the religious idea is considered to be the solution.[3] True it is that religion has been a great socializing and moralizing factor in human society but "organised religion, though it can provide a means of inner uplift for the individual

[1] H. Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, pp. 23, 101.
[2] Radhakrishnan in *An Idealist View of Life*, p. 305, pleads for a transition from ethical individualism to spiritual universalism.
[3] For the inadequacy of ethics, religion and reason to bring human redemption see *The Synthesis of Yoga*, vol. I, p. 150. Aurobindo, in *Thoughts and Glimpses*, p. 40, does recognize that all religions have saved a number of souls but have not been able to spiritualize mankind.

and preserve in it or behind it a way for his opening to spiritual experience, has not changed human life and society; it could not do so because, in governing society, it had to compromise with the lower parts of life and could not insist on the inner change of the whole being."[1] Religions have often tended to become credal and formal and they are founded upon a theological and cosmological scheme which may not stand the onslaughts of science and reason. Religions, though, they may originate in the superconscious experiences of great spiritual geniuses, tend to accumulate a lot of local and national historical traditions in the course of their social and institutional development and hence they lack a universally acceptable formula. At times there is too great a hostility among the followers of different religions, and so religion cannot solve the problems of mankind. One has to go even beyond the religious formula; only in the change of the inward consciousness lies the real and the perfect solution.[2]

3. THE NECESSITY OF SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Thus we see that Aurobindo rejects as inadequate the democratic, the communist, the socialist, the international institutional, the humanist, the ethical and the religious solutions. All these formulas and theories are only partial[3] and the attempts to realize them in history reveal the failure of mankind to solve its social and political problems by external means. The real solution lies inwards, not only in the discovery of spiritual power but in its social and political use. Contemporary humanity has created the institutional framework of a vast civilization. Science, logic, technology and economics have been harnessed to create the external paraphernalia of a stupendous civilization, whose colossal structure would stagger

[1] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 931.

[2] Sri Aurobindo, *Bases of Yoga*, pp. 50-1. In some religions there is an exaggerated obsession with sin, self-deprecation and failure. But the spiritual and supramental transformation for which Aurobindo stands would look upon defects and difficulties as due to the workings of lower nature. According to Aurobindo (*The Synthesis of Yoga*, Part II, *Advent*, 1950, p. 251), Hebraism stands for the righteousness of the God-fearing man, while the Yoga which he pleads for stresses purity, love and beneficence of the saint and the God-lover.

[3] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 721.

the imagination of the Egyptian of the days of the Pyramids, or the military knights of the days of Charlemagne and Otto. But the actualizations of sociological and scientific formulas and imperatives have not led to the real and permanent solution of the problems of man. Human society and civilization today are perhaps exposed to a far greater insecurity than in the days of the Huns, the Vandals and the Teutons. Aurobindo thinks the real culprit is the titanic devil—the "blundering ego and its appetites". The attempts of the vital unregenerate ego to impose its will and sanctions everywhere without any reference to the cosmic and the trans-cosmic are responsible for the present malady, and no outside egency is to be blamed for it. The individual has almost lost his real divine essence and as the Bible said, it would not be worthwhile if man gained the whole world and lost his own soul.

Aurobindo would take the dominant inward orientation of the ancient Vedanta as his starting-point. The human soul, he says, is not a chance product of material nature. It is not even the social self or the constructed personality—concepts which have been made familiar by modern sociology and psychology. It is an eternal aspect of the divine. Man has to listen to the call of the psyche.[1] By a psychic and spiritual transformation he should respond to the revelation of the supernal spiritual light. By the still higher process of supramental ascent he should advance to the most luminous and creative heights. Through supramental descent man should make genuine, sincere and intense efforts to bring down the supreme consciousness-force for social and political regeneration.[2] At the highest level of his endeavours he would need divine cooperation and he would have to become a voluntary instrument of the divine spirit. In his book *The Human Cycle*, Aurobindo presents the picture of a spiritualized society. The great difficulty of man is that his animal propensities and physical-vital tendencies predominate over the intellectual, aesthetic and moral aspects of his existence and therefore produce the real riddle of this double nature of man.[3] The finite personal ego should rise into a universal

[1] *The Life Divine*, vol. I, p. 338.
[2] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, "The Triple Transformation" and "The Ascent towards Supermind", pp. 727-817.
[3] *The Human Cycle*, p. 291.

consciousness and obtain identity with the divine spirit, and then become a voluntary agent of the divine for spiritual works[1] which will have significant social and political orientations. So long humanity has been satisfied with a commonplace existence and has not been aspiring enough to make spiritual efforts on a large scale[2] for collective liberation, though in all ages and countries there have been towering spiritual geniuses. The depth of the spiritual dimension has to be revealed not only for the sake of the blessedness and beatitude of the elect, but has to be made an enduring and permanent factor in the earthly life.

Aurobindo thinks the purpose of individual existence is not the hedonistic ideal of pleasure-seeking or the conventional concept of an organized sociability, but to transcend the ego and to obtain full possession of the spirit. The quest for the spirit is not a dream or a chimera. Aurobindo is thoroughly convinced that there are forces at work for the full emergence of the spiritual power on earth. He wants the total transmutation of present day agencies and instruments of mankind by the attainment of superior divine powers. This would imply the transformation of the sensational, vital and physical nature. Divine illumination will lead to a moulding of the inner and outer existence by its power. Hence the spiritualization of the mental being and its transformation by a spiritual ideality should be the aim even of our vital and physical nature.[3] There should be a progressive transformation into the power and bliss of the universal and the transcendent spirit, and this should be the "ideal of human existence, personal and social". The true concretization of liberty, equality and fraternity as social ideals will necessitate a change of human nature and a growth of the inner spirit and consciousness.[4] Mere political slogans and institutions will not make liberty, equality and fraternity realized social categories. Aurobindo believes in the plasticity and pliability of human nature.[5] It is not something immutable

[1] Sri Aurobindo, "The Delight of Works", *The Superman*, pp. 23-9.

[2] *Thoughts and Glimpses*, p. 32.

[3] *The Human Cycle*, p. 76; *Thoughts and Glimpse*, pp. 40-1; *The Human Cycle*, pp. 301, 297, 73. In *The Riddle of This World*, p. 20, Aurobindo stresses the "change of the whole nature down to the most physical".

[4] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 367-8.

[5] Sri Aurobindo in *Bases of Yoga*, p. 107, contends that "... our nature can be changed in spite of Vivekananda's saying".

but can be changed in response to spiritual endeavours. Aurobindo visualizes a change in the world which would be implemented by Yogis and gnostic beings who have transformed their own consciousness, and consecrate their efforts for a permanent establishment of the divine in the terrestrial nature.[1] But this postulates a change in the inward being of man and a constant and deep aspiration towards the divine. "Until man in his heart is ready, a profound change of world condition cannot come; or it can only be brought about by force, physicial force or else force of circumstances, and that leaves all the real work to be done. A frame may have then been made, but the soul will have still to grow in the mechanical body."[2] There have been some efforts in the past to found a spiritual society but they have failed, and the realization of real truth and beauty and good is still remote.[3] Aurobindo prescribes his own Yogic technique of transformation[4] by a deep spiritual aspiration leading to total self-surrender into the hands of the World-Mother. The psychological transformation and spiritual integration of man imply an initial self-transcendence of the ego. They necessitate the contact with the divine and the reception of spiritual power for the transformation of the whole of a man's being. This transformed humanity is to be utilized as a divine centre in the world.[5]

The emphasis on a change of human nature as the pre-condition of the solution of not only social and political problems but of all the total terrestrial problems of man is very very strong in Aurobindo. In a sense this is the central point in his metaphysics and Yoga. The concept of change or transformation or transmutation of human nature was strong in early Christian theology. St. Augustine believed in the divine illumination of man. Even a modern Orthodox theologian and metaphysician, Nicolas Berdyaev, pleads for a religious transformation of

[1] *Aravinda Mandira Me* (Hindi translation by Deva Narayan Dwivedi, 1924 , pp. 62, 61.

[2] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 348.

[3] *The Human Cycle*, p. 293.

[4] The integral Yoga of Aurobindo is a higher synthesis of the "aims" of Hatha Yoga, Karma Yoga (with its ideal of *Sadrishya* or *Sadharmya* Mukti), Jnana Yoga (with its ideal of *Sayujya* Mukti) and Bhakti Yoga (with its ideal of *Salokya* or *Samipya* Mukti). An utter and total divinization of all the physical, vital and mental parts of a man's being is the dominant concept of the integral Yoga.

[5] The three stages of integral Yoga referred to in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, vol. I, p. 8.

culture. Several European political scientists also visualize the necessity of a change of human nature as a pre-condition for political peace, virtue and justice. Criticizing the plans of Phaleas of Chalcedon about the equalization of property, Aristotle says: "And the avarice of mankind is insatiable; . . . men always want more and more without end, for it is the nature of the desire not to be satisfied, and most men live for the gratification of it. The beginning of reform is not so much to equalize property as to train the nobler sort of nature not to desire more."[1] But while, according to Aristotle, the technique of changing or at least modifying human nature lies in a state-controlled education, in Aurobindo's view education is only a secondary means, the primary emphasis being on spiritual awakening and transformation. The Marxists also believe that consequent upon the consummation of a classless society there would be a change in human nature, and social and administrative work would be managed without the help of any coercive organization. Coercion would have become useless and unnecessary. W.E. Hocking emphasizes the need of a religious remaking of human nature for the success of political democracy.[2] Sorokin pleads for the altruistic integration of the creative human personality as a prior requirement for the success of the institutional devices of socialism or democracy or any world organization.[3] A few sociologists and political scientists have been engaged in the empirical analysis of the formation of democratic personality. Lasswell wants to use the new psychoanalytic techniques for the formation of democratic characters who will be immune against the propaganda of authoritarian ideology. He says: ". . . the modern arsenal of facts about the benevolent potentialities of human nature, and a secure knowledge of methods by which disturbed personality growth can be prevented or cured; . . . There is no rational room for pessimism about the possibility of putting morals into practice on the basis of what we know about the development of human personality."[4]

[1] Aristotle, *Politics*, 1267B. [2] W.E. Hocking, *Human Nature and Its Remaking*.
[3] P.A. Sorokin, *The Reconstruction of Humanity*; P. Sorokin (ed.), *Explorations in Altruistic Love and Behavior* (Boston, 1950).
[4] H.D. Lasswell, *The Analysis of Political Behavior* (the chapter on "Legal Education and Public Policy").

But there is one fundamental difference between Hocking, Sorokin and Lasswell on the one hand and Aurobindo on the other. The former primarily emphasize a psychological training although Sorokin also refers to the mysticism of the Yoga. But while their prescription lays emphasis on mental training and a psychological and psycho-analytic culture, Aurobindo is critical of modern psychology which he considers to be an infant science.[1] He is very condemnatory of psychoanalysis with its tendency to exalt the libido and its attempt to explain the higher in terms of the lower.[2] According to him the political problems of man cannot be solved by merely imparting correct information or by finding the hidden and repressed sources of a man's action. Only by making available to man the plenary and resplendent light of his own divine being can there be attained the conditions for making possible the realization of liberty, equality and fraternity.

4. THE SPIRITUALIZED SOCIETY: CONDITIONS FOR ITS ADVENT AND PROGRESS

The transformation of man's nature would lead to the establishment of an ideal society which Aurobindo calls the spiritualized society. It would be the consummation of the subjective age of human social development. It would be based on the dynamic re-creation of the individual in the divine type by the use of spiritual power.[3] There are becoming evident some faint glimpses and symbols of the growth of "a divine Olympian, Apollonian, Dionysiac" principle in man and their establishment would be the supreme achievement of the human race.[4] Contemporary society treats man primarily as a "*zoon politikon,*" as Aristotle said, or, in Seneca's opinion, as a social being. It emphasizes the gregarious nature of man and wants to harmonize the divergent needs, interests and rights of the individuals. But in the spiritual society man will be treated as a spiritual being or a separate godhead.[5] That necessarily would require a prolonged effort at spiritual self-evolution. There

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *Bases of Yoga*, pp. 111-7. The parapsychologists are talking of supraliminal and ultra-marginal consciousness.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *The Human Cycle*, p. 324.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 289-91.
[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 275-6.

were made some attempts in India to found a spiritualized manhood but they failed because they neglected the spiritual transformation of the vital and intellectual aspects of man, and wanted to evolve a spiritual life by a leap from matter to spirit.[1] According to Aurobindo, the fruition of the spiritual age of mankind requires the simultaneous satisfaction of two conditions.[2] First, the intense desire in individuals to re-create themselves in the spiritual pattern and type. Secondly, "there must be at the same time a mass, a society, a communal mind or at least the constitutents of a group-body, the possibility of a group-soul"[3] which is capable of receiving and assimilating the spiritual message communicated to it by seers and mystics. Hence the only way to a true social perfection lies through a deep and profound "spiritualized subjective understanding of the individual and communal self and its life".[4] This would culminate in the realization of a spiritualized humanity, united in the internal consciousness of a deep brotherhood. Thus alone can real human unity, liberty, equality and peace be achieved.[5]

(a) *The Sociology of the Spiritualized Society*

Democracy and socialism have made some attempts in this direction by their self-conscious and rational attempts at a more perfect social organization, but they have failed because they have neglected the spiritual bond of inner oneness. European sociologists have analyzed the question of social bonds. Tarde elaborates the concept of imitation, Giddings stresses the "consciousness of kind" and Ratzenhofer and Small discuss the various interests.[6] Aurobindo says the deeper spiritual bonds have to be discovered and made available for social regeneration. "A spiritualized society will treat in its sociology the individual, from the saint to the criminal, not as units of a social problem to be passed through some skilfully devised machinery and either flattened into the social mould or crushed

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 313. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 306. [3] *Ibid.*
[4] *The Human Cycle*, pp. 226-7.
[5] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 29-30.
[6] G. Tarde, *Laws of Imitation*; F.H. Giddings, *Descriptive and Historical Sociology*, *Theory of Human Society*; A.W. Small, *General Sociology*.

out of it, but as souls suffering and entangled in a net and to be rescued, souls growing and to be encouraged to grow, souls grown and from whom help and power can be drawn by the lesser spirits who are not yet adults."[1] Instead of being regarded as a mechanical physico-chemical aggregation, the individual should be considered a lost divine being who has to be awakened to the recognition of his spiritual patrimony. Thus can the free and spontaneous growth of individuals be fostered.

The social character of a spiritualized society would be significantly different from the present society. There would be a fundamental equality in this society; an absolute equality of mechanical sameness and uniformity being neither desirable nor possible.[2] The orientation of the spiritualized society would be towards the realization of a "divine family".[3] Persistent endeavour will have to be made towards the realization of "the day when mankind may be really and not ideally one divine family".[4] Instead of the consensual and contractual law of association based on the legal clarification of mutual rights and obligations, there would be the operation of a law of love. While the family and the group only cater to some limited interests, this spiritualized society will be the concrete expression of the sentiment of fraternity based on the notion of the spiritual equality of all human beings. All discords, confusion, conflicts and dissatisfactions will be merged in the supreme outflowering of the ennobling and idealizing harmony of the spirit. There will be the replacement of the coercive techniques and processes of social control by a "deeper brotherhood".[5] "A yet unfound law of love is the only sure foundation possible for a perfect social evolution, no other can replace it."[6] This powerful sentiment of fraternity is to proceed not from the vital instincts, not from the unregenerate passions of man, and not from the intellect, but from the soul. Vivekananda also, like Aurobindo, considered spiritual realization necessary for the genuine manifestation of universal brotherhood.

[1] *The Human Cycle*, p. 318.
[2] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 12.
[3] *The Human Cycle*, pp. 84-5.
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 273; *Dharma Aur Jatiyata* (in Hindi), p. 125.
[6] *The Human Cycle*, p. 273.

The spiritualized society, however, will not tend towards an ascetic self-abnegation; vital and intellectual pursuits will be there but in a changed form. They will also serve the godhead in the individual and the corporate form. The spiritualized society, unlike the philosopher-archon of the *Republic* of Plato,[1] would not impose restrictions and censorship on art and treat artists as imitators, but art also will serve to unseal "the doors of the spirit".[2]

(*b*) *The Politics of the Spiritualized Society*

The basic purpose of the spiritualized society will be the realization of God, freedom and unity.[3] Although three in categorical enumeration, these elements are really one. Without God-consciousness freedom and unity cannot be realized and are bound to remain pious dreams of the sentimentalist. The quest for the freedom of the individual soul inevitably leads to the demand of the same freedom for all. The attainment of spiritual freedom leads to the realization of the inner oneness of all beings. Freedom, equality and unity are the three eternal attributes of the spirit. As long as man is immersed in his individual ego he cannot realize freedom, equality and brotherhood. He will have to achieve ego-transcendence to realize the immanent nature of the spirit.

The spiritual man will not remain satisfied with the development of his own individuality, but will aim at the fulfilment and growth of the larger universality. The state and the society cannot impose their totalitarian demands on such a person. "He will not live either for himself or for the State and society, for the individual and collective ego, but for something much greater, for God in himself and for the Divine in the Universe."[4]

Just as the sociology of the spiritualized society will be oriented to the foundation of a divine family and deep spiritual brotherhood, its politics will aim at the realization of an inner theocracy in place of governmental coercion. The spiritualized society will not rely on external compulsion for getting its will

[1] *Republic*, Books X and III.
[2] *The Human Cycle*, p. 284.
[3] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 368-9.
[4] *The Human Cycle*, p. 322.

realized. Physical and external coercion will diminish and will be finally eliminated. There will be progressive deference to the loyalties and obligations of the inner self. The chief, if not the sole realiance, will be on an inner spiritual compulsion.[1] The attainment of inner freedom postulates conscious and willing obedience to the sovereign laws of God. In the perfectly spiritualized society each man will be not a law unto himself but will be bound by the divine law. He will be conscious of himself as a soul which is spiritual in character and not an ego which, in its aspect of either *homo oeconomicus* or *homo politicus*, is primarily concerned with the pursuit of vital and sensational interests and relies on a collective and competitive clash of egos to establish a tentative and precarious common good.

The perfect society will not eliminate the monarchical, aristocratic or theocratic elements, "but there these would fulfil their natural functions in a conscious body; not maintain and propel an unconscious mass".[2] The supreme political characteristic of the spiritualized society, however, will be "an inner theocracy".[3] This inner theocracy will be utterly removed from the coercive control of a dominant ecclesiastical organization or a militant priesthood, but would act as the inner spiritual guide and power. Aurobindo says: "The free rule, that is to say, the predominant lead, control and influence of the developed spiritual man—not the half-spiritualized priest, saint or prophet or the raw religionist—is our hope for a divine guidance of the race. A spiritualized society can alone bring about a reign of individual harmony and communal happiness; or in words which, though liable to abuse by the reason and the passions, are still the most expressive we can find, a new kind of theocracy, the kingdom of God upon earth, a theocracy which shall be the government of mankind by the Divine in the hearts and minds of men."[4]

The concept of inner theocracy as the political form of the spiritualized society, as formulated by Aurobindo, reminds one of what Nicolas Berdyaev calls the New Middle Ages. According to the Russian thinker "Europe having exhausted the possibilities of humanism, is heading towards a new form

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 321.
[2] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 228n.
[3] *The Human Cycle*, pp. 286-7.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 227.

of medievalism. We are entering the night of a new Middle Ages in which a new blending of races and cultural types is destined to occur. . . . And in order to integrate himself anew, man must submit himself once more to a higher power. Certain aspects of medieval asceticism must be revived in a new form in order to allow the human personality to reveal itself again; and in order that the Christian ideal so essentially a part of man's universal historical destiny might still prove a guiding light. We must now experience immanently what the Middle Ages had experienced transcendentally. The free self-limitation, discipline and submission to the supernatural on the part of man may still prevent the final exhaustion of human creative forces, and prepare the ground for a new Christian Renaissance which would dawn for an elect part of mankind on condition that the human personality had once more become strong and sure of itself."[1] Thus we see two great thinkers with different backgrounds pleading that man should place himself under the guidance of spiritual powers if he is to escape an inevitable crash in his destiny. Influenced by Marx, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky and Vladimir Solovyov, and having witnessed the outrages of Communism in his native Russia, Berdyaev thinks that only a submission to the divine power will redeem the fate of man and restore his spiritual integration. Aurobindo, trained in the Western classics and Hindu metaphysics, and having experience of active revolutionary political leadership, also pleads that the present social and political organizations and structures are in need of the transforming power of the spirit. Both of them thus plead for a theocracy. But this theocracy will enshrine the rule of the divine principle and not of the intolerant Church.

But the difference between Aurobindo and Berdyaev is also significant. The latter is much more inspired by the asceticism and self-restraint of the European Middle Ages than Aurobindo is. In Berdyaev the theological elements of Christianity, such as Grace and Communion, assume a great predominance. Aurobindo, in the tradition of ancient Vedanta, thinks that ultimately the human soul is identical with the spiritual reality

[1] N. Berdyaev, *The Meaning of History*, (London, Geoffrey Bles, 1949), pp. 177-81 *The Origin of Russian Communism* (London, Geoffrey Bles, 1948), pp. 178-9. Berdyaev claims to be a supporter of Christian personalism and the concept of God-humanity.

and this means that if man is faithful to the laws of his real being and self, he is obeying the divine. The central idea in the Christian humanist Berdyaev and the supramentalist Aurobindo is, however, the same. They are pessimistic with regard to present political patterns, and want the release of the hidden spiritual powers for political and social transformation.

It is possible that a spiritualized collectivism will be the essential concomitant of the inner theocracy. Collectivism teaches the subordination of the individual ego to the demands of the community. If collectivism can modify its coercive authoritarian nature and accommodate the formula of individual diversity and multiple development to its own ideal—in short, if collectivism itself undergoes a spiritual transformation, it can reconcile individual freedom with collective welfare, security and order.[1]

So far, war has been a necessary mechanism for the settlement of political disputes. But with the descent of the supramental consciousness-force, when even the spiritualized society will have been transformed into a still higher possibility—the gnostic community, war will be eliminated.[2] Perpetual political discords, strifes, brutalities and violence will then be replaced by a spirit of co-operation and integral harmony. It may be legitimately guessed that even in the spiritualized society there will be a sublimation of pugnacity and war will become obsolete.

Politics so far has been concerned primarily with *Machtpolitik*—with the realization of the ideas of Thrasymachus, Callicles, Machiavelli, Hobbes and Nietzsche. In the name of *Realpolitik* and national interest it has been used for the relentless and reckless pursuit of power and lust. But the politics of the spiritualized society will be completely different. Politics can be made a suitable sphere for the realization of absolute idealism.[3] "In its politics it [the spiritualized society] would not regard the nations within the scope of their own internal life as enormous State machines regulated and armoured with man living for the sake of the machine and worshipping it as his God and his

[1] *The Human Cycle*, pp. 267-8.
[2] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 939.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 205.

larger self, content at the first call to kill others upon its altar.... Neither would it be content to maintain these nations or states in their mutual relations as noxious engines.... It would regard the peoples as group-souls, the Divinity concealed and to be self-discovered in its human collectivities, group-souls meant like the individuals to grow according to their own nature and by that growth to help each other, to help the whole race in the one common work of humanity. And that work would be to find the divine self in the individual and the collectivity and to realise spiritually, mentally, vitally, materially its greatest, largest, richest and deepest possibilities in the inner life of all and their outer action and nature".[1] In general, the politics of the spiritualized society will aim at the progressive infusion of a spiritual principle in political patterns and diplomatic textures. It will not eliminate the will to be or the will to know or the will to power.[2] Nor on the other hand will it consider them ultimates. It will aim at the replacement of *Realpolitik* by the politics of moral virtue, and ultimately will spiritualize politics.

(c) *The Economics of the Spiritualized Society*

The economics of the spiritualized society will not aim at the creation of vast engines of production. Aurobindo says: "The aim of its [the spiritualized society] economics would be not to create a huge engine of production, whether the competitive or the co-operative kind, but to give to men—not only to some but to all men each in his highest possible measure—the joy of work according to their own nature, and free leisure to grow inwardly, as well as a simply rich and beautiful life for all."[3] This would mean that Aurobindo is not in favor of vast economic establishments either co-operative or competitive. He is opposed to the accentuation of productive power by rationalization and growth of mechanical efficiency. But he does not indicate the concrete steps as to how this "simply rich and beautiful life for all" is to be realized without the intensification of production.

Aurobindo's reference to the joy of work implies that he is opposed to the modern machine system which reduces or

[1] *The Human Cycle*, pp. 318-9.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 53. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 318.

almost eliminates creative joy and aesthetic satisfaction in the performance of any work because of intensive specialization and the minute division of labor.[1] The medievalist section among the Guild Socialists in England was also opposed to the modern tendency of industrial concentration on this aesthetic and psychological ground.

The emphasis on leisure or *Schole* is a cardinal point in European political speculations since the time of Aristotle and modern industrial countries are trying very hard to provide their citizens adequate leisure requisite for their mental growth.[2] It would have been better if Aurobindo could point out specific steps to make possible the realization of "a simply rich and beautiful life for all"[3] mankind with adequate leisure and joy of creative work.

There are great defects in the modern system of industrial production, but even its bitterest critics will agree that it has at its command the empirical and instrumental tools to create a much better society. The evils of the industrial system arise not so much from its mechanical and instrumental weaknesses as out of the defective social relations of production. It can be legitimately inferred that the future society visualized by Aurobindo will not be solely agrarian. It will be industrial also. But it will not wish to retain or to accentuate the gigantic industrial establishments of the modern world.

For the transformation of the existing society into the spiritualized society and the still higher gnostic community there should be the practice of trusteeship. Aurobindo says: "Money is the visible sign of a universal force, and this force in its manifestation on earth works on the vital and physical planes and is indispensable to the fullness of the outer life. In its origin and true action it belongs to the Divine."[4] He does not advocate any ascetic self-abnegation renouncing the use of all money nor does he approve of a vitalistic clinging to it. For the divine aspirant he preaches trusteeship. "All wealth belongs to the Divine and those who hold it are trustees and not possessors. It

[1] Cf. The attacks of W. Morris on the modern industrial system.
[2] Cf. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the General Assembly of the United Nations, December 10, 1948.
[3] *The Human Cycle*, p. 318.
[4] Sri Aurobindo, *The Mother*, pp. 19-23.

is with them today, to morrow it may be elsewhere. All depends on the way they discharge the trust."[1]

The concept of trusteeship naturally reminds us of the celebrated Gandhian theory. According to Gandhi, although absolute trusteeship is an abstraction like the Euclidean definition of a point, still it would go higher than any other known method in establishing social equality. Aurobindo does not enter into the detailed analysis of the economics of the spiritualized society, but his advocacy of trusteeship for the divine aspirants would imply that perhaps this idea would be a characteristic feature in the spiritualized society and the gnostic community. It may seem difficult at first sight to reconcile this concept of trusteeship with Aurobindo's view of the spiritualization of collectivism. Collectivism in its spiritualized character would eliminate all ownership of wealth, and no question would arise regarding the owners claiming to be only the trustees of their possessions. If spiritualized collectivism is to be the ideal for the ultimate society, then trusteeship refers only to the personal conduct of the aspirants and the sadhakas and is not to have the same economic and sociological significance which it enjoys, for instance, in the political philosophy of Gandhi. For Gandhi trusteeship is a method to rid society of the evils of landlordism and capitalism. For Aurobindo, on the other hand, trusteeship appears to be a canon governing the attitude of the aspirants for the divine. Perhaps he does not contemplate a large-scale generalized application of it. It may be possible, however, to synthesize spiritual collectivism and the concept of trusteeship. Howsoever thorough-going collectivism might be, certain commodities and articles of consumption are bound to remain in the personal possession of individuals. In a society which has accepted the principle of the socialization of all means of production and is also governed by the spiritually-oriented criteria of action, even so small an amount of consumption goods and personal property would be regarded as consecrated for serving a divine purpose and the individual would cease to be actuated by the instinct of acquisitiveness regarding them. Thus it appears that the concept of complete mental non-ownership and detachment

[1] *Ibid.*

would be the economic ethics of the spiritualized society contemplated by Aurobindo.

(*d*) *Reflections on Aurobindo's Political Idealism*

For the realization of the sociological, political and economic programmes of the spiritualized society, a consecrated spirit of religious surrender to the divine is necessary.[1] In Aurobindo's opinion "the right way to the development of the ideal individual and the ideal society" is to make all life truly and intimately religious.[2] He means by religion in this context not any credal theology or formal ritualistic ceremonialism but a sense of intimate awareness of the presence of the spiritual essence in all human beings.

The idea of the spiritualized society represents the futurism and millennialism in Aurobindo's social philosophy. It is a new element in Hindu political and philosophical thought.[3] Traditionally, Hinduism represents the future as a progressive deterioration from the ideal past of the *Satya Yuga*. Christianity also starts with the conception of the fall of man but conceives of a perfection to be attained in the future. According to Hindu philosophy as represented in its classic form in the Vedanta, temporal progressive perfectionism is not a valid idea. Perfection belongs to eternity and the individual can be perfect only by transcending the historical process. The notion of "Mukti" implies the attainment of an eternal consciousness and not the growth and development of a person in the time-process. Although the aspirant may need time to become perfect, at the climax of his efforts, i.e. at the point when he obtains perfection, time becomes irrelevant. But Aurobindo accepts spiritual transformation in historical time; he thinks that the end of the subjectivist age of the present human cycle is preparing the

[1] Aurobindo in *More Lights on Yoga*, p. 105, pleads for faith "in the experience of things other than are written in the philosophy of Haeckel or Huxley or Bertrand Russell".

[2] *The Human Cycle*, pp. 214-5.

[3] According to Aurobindo, the traditional Hindu typology of fourfold values—*Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* and *Moksha*, put *Moksha* at the end of life and in another sphere. "But this rules out the idea of the kingdom of God on earth, the perfectibility of society and of man in society, the evolution of a new and diviner race, and without one or other of these no universal ideal can be complete." *The Human Cycle*, p. 202.

ground for the advent of the spiritual age of humanity. The spiritual age will be a concrete social, economic and political era and not a purely spiritual conceptual reality to be inwardly apprehended by the individual.

But the advent of the spiritualized society is not something inevitable from my standpoint. First, there are no definite criteria to prove that we are passing through the end of the subjective age. Calling the present age subjective, as Aurobindo does, only amounts to the conceptualization of the tendencies of the present day world in psychic and mental categories. These can equally be conceptualized in physical and objective terms. Some may regard the present as a vitalistic epoch of technological civilization while some may think of it as an atheistic epoch of soulless materialism and megalopolitanism. The religious preacher and theologian may regard it as a prelude to the reign of God on earth. The dominant interpretation that we may give to an age is only a reflection of our personal preferences and values. There is no finality and definiteness about it. There can be no precision when one has to deal with the facts and phenomena of the entire human civilization. When the categorization of the present as a subjective epoch is doubtful, the hope that the future is going to be a spiritual age is but a remote vision. Secondly, one of the basic points emphasized constantly by Aurobindo is the distinction between the ethical and the mental on the one hand, and the spiritual on the other. But the various characteristics of the politics and economics of the spiritualized society are described by him essentially in sociological terms, i.e. the growth of peace and harmony and the absence of coercion and want etc. So far as these goals are concerned, a rational society also wants to actualize them. The rationalists prescribe concrete and tangible methods to achieve them. But the prescription of Yoga and spiritual techniques for the attainment of a psychological transformation which would be the foundation for a spiritualized society with a regenerated politics, economics and sociology sounds a remote possibility to the realistic modern temper.

But although the notion of the spiritualized society seems like a remote and distant vision, it has often appealed to several thinkers in various civilizations. The ancient Hindu epics

speak of the *Dharma Rajya* when the guiding political principle is a generalized spiritual and moral norm.[1] Vivekananda also visualized a spiritual transcendence of modern society. He said: "... Society did not exist long ago, possibly will not exist hence. Most probably it is one of the passing stages through which we are going towards a higher evolution."[2] In the ancient Christian scriptures we find references to a divine humanity. Kant speaks of the possibility of a "Divine community on earth".[3] According to Toynbee, in the last phase of a civilization there is the emergence of a new religion and a new universal church which provide a saving power. Sorokin visualizes the end of our present sensate values and their replacement by an ideational system. Karl Mannheim speaks of the need for spiritual paradigmatic integration in a planned society; he thinks that liberalism can do without a religion but planning postulates an integrating faith.[4] Hence we find several historians and sociologists speaking either of the desirability or the inevitability of a religious transformation for solving the problems of a too materialistic age.[5] Aurobindo's concept of the spiritualized society is a sublime addition to the idealistic and utopian phases of political thought.

5. BEYOND POLITICS: THE SUPERMAN AND THE GNOSTIC COMMUNITY

(a) *Differences in the Nietzschean and the Aurobindian Concepts of Superman*

Besides formulating the concept of the spiritualized society, Aurobindo speaks of a still higher possibility — the supramentalized divine superman and the gnostic community. The concept of the superman he borrows from Nietzsche, but reinterprets it in the light of his own spiritual metaphysics. He thinks that Nietzsche takes the lead in the direction of a vita-

[1] *The Spirit and Form of Indian Polity*, pp. 77-8.
[2] Vivekananda, "The Necessity of Religion", *Complete Works*, vol. II, p. 64.
[3] Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Pure Reason*, Book III, 1, Section 7; for quotation from Kant see R. Niebuhr, *Faith and History*, pp. 179-80.
[4] Karl Mannheim, *Diagnosis of Our Time*, p. 101.
[5] P.A. Sorokin, *Social Philosophies of an Age of Crisis*, pp. 295-6.

listic reaction against the nineteenth century materialism.[1] Nietzsche, in his book *Als Sprach Zarathustra* postulated two mysteries: Eternal Recurrence and Superman.[2] Perhaps the concept of the *Übermensch*, which is translated in English as superman, Nietzsche took from Renan.[3] The Greeks according to Nietzsche, preached a master morality. In the *Manusmriti* Nietzsche found a concrete example of the preaching of dominant master morality. Democracy, Christianity and Socialism were, according to him, supreme examples of the perversity of the Jews. He advocated a transvaluation of values which would apply to the new superhuman race of highly gifted men.[4] Nietzsche thinks there has not yet been any superman. As he says: "Ye have made your way from worm to man and much within you is still worm. Once were ye apes, and even yet man is more of an ape than any of the apes. Even the wisest among you is only a disharmony and hybrid of plant and phantom. But do I bid you become phantom and plants. Lo, I teach you the superman. The superman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: The superman shall be the meaning of the earth. Upward goes our way from species to super-species."[5] "Never yet hath there been a superman. Naked have I seen both of them, the greatest man and the smallest man: all too-similar are they still to each other. Verily the greatest found I all-too-human."[6] It is doubtful if Nietzsche used the term superman in any biological sense as indicating a higher species than man.[7]

[1] *The Human Cycle*, pp. 33, 288-9.

[2] Friedrich W. Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (Everyman Edition), p. 7: "Man is a rope stretched betwixt beast and superman—a rope over an abyss. . . . Man is great in that he is a bridge and not a goal . . . ." *Ibid.*, p. 43: "Where the state *ceaseth*—I pray you look there, my brethren! Do you not see it, the rainbow, the bridge to the superman?" *Ibid.*, p. 253: "Up and on, ye higher men! Only now traveleth the mountain of man's future. God is dead: now we *will* that the superman live."

[3] G. Brandes, *F. Nietzsche*, E.T. 1914, referred to in Havelock Ellis, "Nietzsche", *Encyclopaedia of Religions and Ethics*. Nietzsche possibly began at the age of seventeen to use the term *Ubermensch* applying it to the heroes of Byron and later of Shakespeare.

[4] Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht*: *Versuch zur Umwertung aller Werte*. According to Oscar Levy, "Nietzsche", *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the transvaluation of values is applicable only for the supermen.

[5] Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] According to Charles Andler, "Nietzsche", *E.S.S.*, Nietzsche upheld that a

Aurobindo has taken up the concept of the superman as found in Nietzsche, whom he calls "the mystic of will-worship, the troubled, profound, half-luminous . . . with his strange clarities, his violent half-ideas, his rare gleaming visions that come marked with the stamp of an absolute truth and sovereignty of light[1]." He credits Nietzsche with having brought back something of the old vital dynamism into a too intellectual and barren metaphysics. But at the same time he thinks that the neglect of the concept of being in Nietzsche makes his philosophy "unsatisfactory, insufficient, lop-sided; it stimulates but solves nothing".[2]

Aurobindo is inspired by the concept of the superman, but he thinks that the Nietzschean formulation of it would lead to an inordinate exaggeration of the vital and intellectual ego.[3] Such a supermanhood can colossalize the human creature but it cannot transform, exalt and divinize his consciousness.[4] It lays the emphasis on the extension and magnification of the powers of the individual; the increase of human forces comes to be its central ideal.[5] Such a supermanhood necessarily carries with it an idea of forceful domination over and conquest of other weaker human beings,[6] and the rabid consequences of such an ideal of power-politics and aggressiveness we saw in the attempts of Hitler and Mussolini to dominate the world. According to Aurobindo this is a demoniac and egoistic supermanhood; its crystallization would mark a retrograde step in evolution and would lead to the dominance of ignorance and inconscience, and not to the overflowering of the noble and the divine in man. The main defect in the Nietzschean formula is that it loses the link of Nature's moral evolution, because the superman will

biological selection, consciously organized, would produce an aristocracy of a purer and more vigorous blood. According to Havelock Ellis, "Nietzsche", *E.R.E.*, there is rarely or never any biological use of the term superman as denoting a higher species in the Darwinian sense.

1 Sri Aurobindo, *The Superman* (Calcutta, 1944), pp. 2-3.

2 Sri Aurobindo, *Heraclitus*, pp. 45-6, 15, 23.

3 *The Life Divine*, vol. II, pp. 523, 942.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 523.

5 *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, p. 254; "Man must become better and more wicked—thus I teach. The wickedest is needed for the superman's best." *Ibid.*, "For to-day the petty folk are become master: they all preach submission and humility and cunning and diligence and consideration and all the long et cetera of petty virtues."

6 Aurobindo in *The Human Cycle*, p. 47, blames Treitschke for having misapplied Nietzsche's teachings.

not accept the Christian ethic of sorrow and service.[1] "Nietzsche hymned the Olympian but presented him with the aspect of the Asura."[2]

Aurobindo takes the concept of the superman from Nietzsche but attributes to him the aspect of a divine being. Supermanhood, for Aurobindo, implies the conscious evolution of man in the next superior type. In the course of evolutionary progression man has evolved on the basis of the animal organization and structure, and it is possible that "man himself may well be a thinking and living laboratory, in whom and with whose conscious co-operation she [Nature] will work out the Superman, the god".[3] This growth and evolution of man into the divine absolute will imply a transmutation of his present imperfect being and mentality into the fullness of divine power and force.[4] The divinized superman would not be the colossal replica of Caesar or Charlemagne, but would lead mankind by a compelling inner sympathy and transforming moral and spiritual power. The superhuman life would fulfil the inherent and predestined goal of nature because it would be the conscious perfection of knowledge and will.[5] Aurobindo constantly speaks of the divine character of the superman. He further says that the superman is a believer in destiny and thinks himself to be the instrument of a vast energy for the performance of world-moving deeds.[6]

Aurobindo is insistent that the emergence of the supramental superman is an imperative necessity if the evolutionary crisis has to be surmounted. He says: "Either man must fulfil himself by satisfying the Divine within him or he must produce out of himself a new and greater being who will be more capable of satisfying it. He must either himself become a divine humanity

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *The Superman*, pp. 3-4.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *The Life Divine*, vol. I, p. 4.
[4] Sri Aurobindo, *The Superman*, p. 81.
[5] *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 177.
[6] Sri Aurobindo, "All-Will and Free-Will", *The Superman*, p. 14: "He (A great man of action) expresses in the idea of Fate his living and constant sense of the energy which has cast him down here. . . .Like Indra or Bhagirath he precedes; the throng of the divine waters follow. . . .Therefore we find that the greatest men of action the world has known were believers in Fate or in a Divine will. Caesar, Mahomet, Napoleon, what more colossal workers has our past than these? The superman believes more readily in Destiny, feels more vitally conscious of God than the average human mind."

or give place to Superman."[1] He refers several times to the new divine race.[2] He is positively certain that the only way to a real solution of the problems of man is that there should be a divine transmutation of man. This is not only the perfect solution but the only solution. ". . . if this (the spiritual change) is not the solution, then there is no solution, if this is not the way then there is no way for the human kind. Then the terrestrial evolution must pass beyond man as it has passed beyond the animal and a greater race must come that will be capable of the spiritual change."[3] There should be a dynamic change in the present structure of consciousness. The appearance of a new type of people imbued with a consciousness beyond the mental — the supramental consciousness, is an imperative necessity. The supermind being the creative divine power capable of infinite diversity, the new supramental race (which is fully imbued with the consciousness and power of the supermind) will not reproduce a colourless fixed pattern but will have endless diversity in its processes of manifestation. The superman will operate not with extended mental and intellectual powers, which after all are mixed with ignorance, but with the pure force and dynamic spontaneous capacity for knowledge. Hence a total transcendence of the ego and the collaboration of love, knowledge and will, will characterize the superman and "not a haughty, strong and brilliant egoistic self-culture enthroning itself upon an enslaved humanity".[4]

Nietzsche glorified the transvaluation of values in his *Der Wille zur Macht : Versuch zur Umwertung aller Werte*. Aurobindo also advocates the reversal of values.[5] Of course, the values of Aurobindo and Nietzsche are different. Nietzsche believes in the Hellenic emphasis on reason and power. Aurobindo wants the cultivation of knowledge, good and bliss. The life of the gnostic beings would be characterized by a total spiritual transformation of the normal values of a world of material nature. There will be a supreme and radical reversion of consciousness in the direction of the realization of the absolute,

[1] *The Life Divine*, vol. I, p. 252.
[2] *The Human Cycle*, pp. 76n, 99, 274.
[3] *The Human Cycle*, p. 274.
[4] Sri Aurobindo, *The Superman*, pp. 12-3.
[5] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, pp. 928, 938-9.

divine values of supernal existence, consciousness and delight.[1] In short, there would be a transmuting reversal of the whole nature.[2] He feels that humanity is slowly becoming conscious of the inadequacy of the old values and is groping for a new set of value constellations.

According to Aurobindo the descent of the supramental power will lead to the emergence of the force of supernature. This gnostic supernature will transcend the values given credence by the normal nature of man which, after all, is a product of ignorance. But since nature is not a product of pure ignorance but also of half-knowledge, it is "reasonable to suppose that whatever spiritual truth there is in or behind its standards and values will reappear in the higher life, not as standards, but as elements transformed, uplifted out of ignorance and raised into the true harmony of a luminous existence". Aurobindo accepts the transmutation of the normal values into the absolute divine values.[3] His basic political values are freedom and unity. The supramental transformation will exalt them into permanent aspects of the divinized society. Without supramental gnosis the concrete realization of an enlightened, intuitive,

[1] Sri Aurobindo, *On Yoga*, I, (Pondichery, 1955), p. 790: "The gnosis discovers the spiritual sense in Nature, God in things, the soul of good in all things that have the contrary appearance; that soul is delivered in them and out of them, the perversions of the imperfect or contrary forms fall away or are transformed into their higher divine truth—even as the gunas go back to their divine principles—and the spirit lives in a universal, infinite and absolute Truth, Good, Beauty, Bliss which is the supramental or ideal divine Nature. The liberation of the Nature becomes one with the liberation of the spirit, and there is founded in the integral freedom the integral perfection."

[2] Sri Aurobindo, *The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth* (Pondichery, 1952), pp.111-2: "A New humanity would then be a race of mental beings on the earth and in the earthly body but delivered from its present conditions in the reign of the cosmic Ignorance so far as to be possessed of a perfected mind, a mind of light which could even be a subordinate action of the supermind or Truth-Consciousness and in any case capable of the full possibilities of mind acting as a recipient of that truth and at least a secondary action of it in thought and life. It could even be a part of what could be described as a divine life upon earth and at least the beginnings of an evolution in the Knowledge and no longer entirely or predominantly in the Ignorance. How far this would go, whether it would eventually embrace the whole of humanity or only an advanced portion of it, would depend upon the intention in the evolution itself, on the intention in whatever cosmic or transcendent Will is guiding the movements of the universe. We have supposed not only the descent of the supermind upon the earth but its embodiment in a supramental race with all its natural consequences and a new total action in which the new humanity would find its complete development and its assured place in the new order."

[3] *Savitri*, (Sri Aurobindo Ashrama, Pondichery) Book XI, Canto 1, "The Eternal Day: The Soul's Choice and the Supreme Consummation", pp. 328-32:

spontaneous free association and divine self-possessed unity is impossible.

Aurobindo's conception of the supramental superman whose emergence leads to the transmutation of the normal human values into divine values, is a remarkable synthesis of Nietzsche's thought and Hindu metaphysics. The concept of superman Aurobindo takes from Nietzsche, and also the basic notion that man can be transcended.[1] To that he adds the idea of a mystic and a Yogic transforming technique whereby the human consciousness can be changed into a superhuman consciousness. In modern Western thought Schopenhauer expounded the philosophy of the supremacy of a cosmic will. Schopenhauer's emphasis on the will-to-be was transformed by Nietzsche into will-to-power.[2] Oswald Spengler was greatly influenced by

"These are the high forerunners, the heads of Time,
The great deliverers of earth-bound mind,
The high transfigurers of human clay,
The first-born of a new supernal race.

The superman shall wake in mortal man
And manifest the hidden demi-god
Or grow into the God-Light and God-Force
Revealing the secret deity in the cave.

A mightier race shall inhabit the mortal's world.
On Nature's luminous tops, on the Spirit's ground,
The superman shall reign as king of life,
Make earth almost the mate and peer of heaven
And lead towards God and truth man's ignorant heart
And lift towards godhead his mortality.

When superman is born as Nature's king
His presence shall transfigure Matter's world:
He shall light up Truth's fire in Nature's night,
He shall lay upon the earth Truth's greater law;
Man too shall turn towards the Spirit's call.

Then man and superman shall be at one
And all the earth become a single life.
Even the multitude shall hear the Voice
And turn to commune with the Spirit within
And strive to obey the high spiritual law:
This earth shall stir with impulses sublime,
Humanity awake to deepest self,
Nature the hidden godhead recognise."

[1] Eric Bentley in *The Cult of the Superman* (London, 1947) deals with Thomas Carlyle, Friedrich Nietzsche, Richard Wagner, Bernard Shaw, Oswald Spengler, D.H. Lawrence and Stefan George as protagonists of the idea of the superman as the manifestation of "heroic vitalism".

[2] *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, p. 106: "Only where there is life is there will: not

Goethe and Nietzsche and glorified Caesarism and Prussianism. Aurobindo, influenced by the Rig Veda, the older Upanishads, the Gita and the Tantra, gives a supramental connotation to the superman. We find thus two polar metamorphoses of Nietzscheanism at the hands of Spengler and Aurobindo.[1] Nietzsche exalts the Caesar but gives the highest rank to the thinker who creates new values.[2] Spengler repudiates the significance which Nietzsche has attributed to the thinker, and preaches a philosophy according to which the historical structure bears the impress of the great military hero and the diplomat. But Aurobindo adumbrates the formula of the transcendence of phenomenal nature by the knowledge-force of the supermind and the eventual emergence of the gnostic community.

(*b*) *The Superman, the Vibhuti, the Avatara and the Philosopher-King*

Aurobindo compares the European conception of the superman with the Gita conception of the Vibhuti. The supermen or Vibhutis are "manifestations of Nature, of divine power presided over by a spirit commissioned for the purpose, and that spirit is an emanation from the Almighty, who accepts human strength and weakness but is not bound by them. They are above morality, and ordinarily without a conscience, acting according to their own nature. For they are not men developing upwards from the animal to the divine and struggling against their lower natures but beings already fulfilled and satisfied with themselves."[3] Aurobindo consides Ravana to be a Vibhuti comparable to Napoleon. There are two types of Vibhutis.[4] First, those who suppress the force in their personality in order to conserve it and project it wholly into their

will to life but thus do I teach thee—will to power. Much doth the living value higher than life itself; but in the very act of valuing speaketh—the will to power."

[1] In *The Reconstruction of the Religious Thought of Islam*, pp. 160-1, Mohammad Iqbal criticizes the mechanism of the concept of Eternal Recurrence. He is also critical of the fatalism involved in the Nietzschean concept of the superman. See also S. Sinha, *Iqbal: The Poet and His Message*, p. 351.

[2] Some democratic socialists like Mutzschler in Switzerland and Landauer in Germany partially adhered to the Nietzschean concept of the superman.

[3] Sri Aurobindo, "Historical Impressions", *op. cit.*, pp. 167-8.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 169.

work, e.g. Shakespeare, Washington, Victor Emmanuel. Secondly, those who are gigantic and colossal both in their personality as also in their work, e.g. Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon, Goethe. It is clear that these personalities, known as Vibhutis according to the terminology of the Gita,[1] and supermen in the general Western tradition, are not the supermen of Aurobindo's conception because the latter are divine supramentalized beings.

The superman, as conceived by Aurobindo, is different from the Avatara or incarnation of Hindu mythology. The incarnations are "representative cosmic men"[2] who have been divine instruments for establishing certain essential elements in the process of the terrestrial evolution of man. They open the way for humanity to a higher consciousness.[3] But while the incarnations represent the descent of the divine consciousness, the supermen are the concrete expressions of the ascending evolution of the human consciousness into the gnostic formula.[4]

There is a great difference between the philosopher-guardian of Plato's *Republic* and the superman of Aurobindo's conception. Plato prescribes a systematic educational training for the guardians, advancing from arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and harmonics to the supreme science of the inter-relations of ideas — the dialectic.[5] Aurobindo emphasizes an inward gnostic transformation and not a mere intellectual culture. Plato is opposed to any attempt to attain the highest knowledge by a "leap". He wants to go the hard way. He prescribes a rigorous

[1] According to the Gita as interpreted by Aurobindo the Avatara leads the Vibhuti (the man who has risen to the greatest heights of mere manhood) to the divine birth and divine works.

[2] Sri Aurobindo, *Letters: Second Series,* p. 514.

[3] Sri Aurobindo, *Letters, Second Series,* pp. 500, 505, 506—The Avataras are not concerned with commonplace standards of perfection and ethics. They are not bound to do extraordinary actions but must give their actions a meaning and import which "are part of something essential to be done in the history of the earth and its races". Avatarhood is fundamentally linked with the process of terrestrial evolution "which is the evolution of the embodied spirit through successive stages towards the divine". (*Ibid.,* p. 507).

[4] Sri Aurobindo, *Letters, Second Series,* pp. 29, 507, 493, 514, 505-6; see *Essays on the Gita,* chapters XV-XVII, on the possibility, purpose and process of Avatarhood and the divine birth and divine works. According to Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita,* vol. I, p. 247, the Reformation and the French Revolution needed only Vibhutis and not Avataras.

[5] *Republic,* Book VII, 522-34.

training in the mathematical sciences as a propaedeutic to the study of dialectical philosophy. Aurobindo thinks that reason is an inadequate instrument for the transformation that he envisages. Therefore, while the emergence of the supreme guardians or philosopher-kings depends on a mathematical-dialectical training, the emergence of the divine superman requires a spiritual transmutation. In spite of this difference, both Plato and Aurobindo are agreed in thinking that the permanent solution of social and political problems cannot be obtained by ordinary means. There is to be a supra-political solution of the problems of the world, be it by the philosophic reason of the supreme ruler or by the supramental identity-consciousness of the superman. Both Plato and Aurobindo took their ideas seriously. Plato wanted to make Syracuse the centre for the practice of his ideas. When he failed there he prescribed a second-best political type in his *Laws*. Aurobindo performed intense Sadhana for forty years in Pondichery for realizing the supramental principle. Although Plato failed to realize the concrete expression of his political philosophy he gave to the Western world an undying vision of a futurist political principle and became the supreme inspiration for later utopian writings in More, Campanella and others. Aurobindo's conception perhaps may have a similar role for the Indian cultural and political consciousness. Nor can we condemn all such idealism as mere intellectual idea-spinning on the part of philosophical aristocrats. Even Fichte — that protagonist of the closed commercial state, thought in his old age that government should be entrusted to the all-wise philosophers and their reason should guide the state. Political idealism is not a pure chimera, it provides a dynamic impetus to humanity to advance beyond the petty satisfactions of the immediate present.

(c) *The Gnostic Community and the Divine Life*

Aurobindo visualizes the inevitability not merely of the emergence of the superman but also of a supramental community leading a divine life and living in a gnostic consciousness. The descent of the supramental power will have two conse-

quences: the emergence of the supernature[1] and the emergence of gnostic beings.[2] This perfectionist consummation would require not merely the sincere aspirations and upward evolutionary endeavours of individuals but also the consent or assent of the supreme divine force.[3] The gnostic community that would be thus perfected would be vitally different from the normal human collectivities and subtotalities. It would be not a mechanical aggregation held together by the artificial and competitive bonds of mutual self-interest but would be a spiritual formation. There would be a synthesis of the normally antithetical principles of freedom and order.[4] Instead of discords, contradictions and disparities there would be the operation of a spontaneous natural adjustment, universal consensus and an organic unity of gnostic nature.[5] Conceptual rational thought which represents the acme of human intellectualism would be replaced in the gnostic community by an identity-consciousness.[6] Identity-consciousness would generate a truth-vision which will amount to a complete enlightenment regarding cosmic objects. In the supramental consciousness thought would be a derivative movement of the comprehensive plenary truth-vision and not the determining or main force.[7] The consummation of the collective life of gnostic beings would represent the concrete embodiment of the highest power and force of the spiritual reality in the course of terrestrial evolutionary progression. The supramental beings lodged in a cosmic consciousness would be typifications of a spiritual individuality

[1] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 412: Supernature-supreme Shakti=self=power of the Divine Existence.

[2] Aurobindo claims that the integral transformation which he has been advocating is different from the old Yogic and mystical disciplines in three significant respects: (*i*) Although the Vedas contain references to the supermind, there is no certainty that the Vedic Rishis had a complete awareness of the science of the supermind. (*ii*) In ancient and medieval times or even by modern saints and mystics, no attempt has been made to divinize the earth-nature. The spiritualization aimed at was confined to the mental or at best to the vital planes. (*iii*) In the other systems of Yoga and mysticism the principal aim is personal liberation or salvation and not the collective perfection and transformation of mankind.

[3] *The Mother*, pp. 82, 83-4. The supramental change is "decreed and inevitable".

[4] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, pp. 873-5.

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 280. There are four cognitive methods of nature: (*a*) knowledge by identity, (*b*) knowledge by intimate direct contact, (*c*) knowledge by separative direct contact and (*d*) wholly separative knowledge by indirect contact.

[7] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, pp. 870-1.

based on the synthesis of particularity, universality and transcendence[1] — the three aspects of the supreme reality. There would be the operation of a self-aware spiritual unity. The community would act as a spiritually conscious unit. The direct awareness of the unity of all beings would lead to the consciousness of a fundamental identity of all existence. This realization of spiritual fraternity is beyond the reach of all social altruism and philanthropy. Just as the Hindu ideal of the *Satya Yuga* formulates the notion of a spontaneous and self-supported harmony,[2] so also the gnostic community will be marked by unity, mutuality and harmony. "A life of unity, mutuality and harmony born of a deeper and wider truth of our being is the only truth of life that can successfully replace the imperfect mental constructions of the past, which were a combination of association and regulated conflict, an accommodation of egos and interests, grouped and dovetailed into each other to form a society, a consolidation by common general life-motives, an unification by need and pressure and struggle with outside forces."[3] The gnostic beings having sublated their egoistic personalities would exemplify the working of the principle of true self-determination in all their actions.[4] Since this self-determination would be the manifestation of an all-awareness and world-awareness it would involve no struggle for its maintenance but would portray the automatic spontaneous self-flow of spiritual self-nature, *Svabhava*.[5] The egoistic and hedonistic standards of pleasure and pain would be replaced, not by a Stoic norm of philosophic indifference, but by the spiritual quest of an all-embracing personal-impersonal delight.[6] The supermen would not be all similar to one another but would manifest the divine principle of multiple becoming and diversity. Their life would not be one of pure contemplation and transcendent absorption but they would also perform divine

[1] Cf. The Hegelian conception of Individuality as the synthesis of particularity and universality. "Individuality...is posited already by particularity, which is determinate universality, that is self-relating determinateness or the determinate determinate." Hegel, *Science of Logic*, vol. II, p. 253.

[2] *The Human Cycle*, p. 155.

[3] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, (Calcutta, 1944), p. 927.

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 857-9.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 859; *War and Self-determination*, pp. 46-7.

[6] *The Life Divine*, vol. I, p. 270.

spiritualized actions for the sake of the divine[1] and also for the good of the untransformed part of humanity. There would be different grades of gnostic beings.[2] Some would represent the dynamic realization of the higher mind, some of the illumined mind, some of intuition, and some of the overmind. Some would manifest the transforming power of the supermind. There can be an evolution even beyond the supermind to the three absolute supernals of supreme existence, consciousness and bliss. There would not be any hostility between the members of the gnostic community and the untransformed human beings. In cases of possible attacks by the latter, the gnostic beings will have the power to protect themselves. They would continue to work for the progressive upward evolution of the untransformed section.[3]

The concrete realization of the gnostic community will lead to the perfection of man.[4] The perfection of the world demands the perfection of individuals; Aurobindo thinks that the descent of the supermind for the transformation of the collectivity necessitates its realization first by a few individuals who would teach and inspire, guide and lead the rest. Perfection does not mean the maximization of material civilization and a growing control over nature, but the inward comprehension of the impersonality and calm of the supreme spirit, and making that the foundation of a free and inexhaustible activity. ". . . as the perfect man would combine in himself the silence and activity, so also would the completely conscious soul reach back to the absolute freedom of the Non-Being without therefore losing its hold on Existence and the Universe."[5] The perfection of man and society has been a constant aspiration of idealistic humanity since olden times and in various forms — the supreme quest for the city of God, or the millennium, or the new heaven and earth of the Apocalypse, or the *Dharmayuga* of the Indian epics — it has been inspiring mankind.[6] According to Aurobindo this perfection cannot be attained by the powers of human

[1] Cf. The concept of "Divine Activity" in *Essays on the Gita*, vol. II, p. 408.
[2] Haridas Chaudhry, *Sri Aurobindo*, pp. 185, 199, 265.
[3] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 916.
[4] *The Life Divine*, vol. I, pp. 33, 37.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 37.
[6] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 232.

mind and reason alone.[1] There is the necessity of a higher power — the supermind. Perfection is not eschatological splendour but a concrete synthesis of earth and spirit. Therefore he formulates the gospel of a total transformation of the earth-nature.[2] He says that there should be the descent of the divine consciousness which would lead to the self-exceeding and self-fulfilment of man. "Our evolution in the ignorance with its chequered joy and pain of self-discovery and world-discovery, its half-fulfilments, its constant finding and missing, is only our first state. It must lead inevitably towards an evolution in the knowledge, a self-finding and self-unfolding of the spirit, a self-revelation of the Divinity in things in that true person of itself in Nature which is to us still a Supernature."[3]

Aurobindo thinks there have been many individuals in the past who have attained the highest spiritual realization, but their realization was on the mental or overmental plane. Some of them certainly achieved the realization of the highest spiritual reality — Sachchidananda, but it was reached by a leap from the mind to the supreme heights.[4] The Vedic and the Upanishadic seers had some faint glimpses of the supermind.[5] Aurobindo claims to have endeavoured not only to ascend to the supermind but to make it a constant force inhabiting the earth-consciousness and working out a transmutation of humanity. His principal aim was not personal emancipation or

[1] In the poem "Thought the Paraclete", *Collected Poems and Plays*, vol. II, p. 300, Sri Aurobindo describes the inadequacy of thought to pierce the heart of reality:

"Thought the great-winged wanderer paraclete
Disappeared slow-singing a flame-word rune."

[2] Sri Aurobindo, *Lights on Yoga*, pp. 4-5: Life mind, supermind and Sachchidananda are in principle "involved here in the earth-consciousness" and it is essential to make them dynamic, explicitly evolved, operative principles. Vladimir Solovev also accepted the doctrine of a transfiguration not only of man but also of the whole cosmos.

[3] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 945.

[4] *Letters: First Series*, pp. 17-8. Aurobindo stresses the realization of Sachchidananda not only on the plane of the spiritualized mind as was done in previous eras but on the supramental plane.

[5] *The Riddle of This World*, p. 32. In the Vedas there are five powers—Mahi or Bharati, Ira, Sarasvati, Sarama and Dakshina—of the Truth-Consciousness or Supermind; Sri Aurobindo, *Hymns to the Mystic Fire* (First Edition), pp. XLIII-XLIV. For higher levels within the supramental realm, in the Vedas, *The Human Cycle* p. 333. Varuna, Mitra, Aryama and Bhaga are the four deities manifesting the supermind in the Vedas. According to *The Isha Upanishad*, pp. 95-6, Vijnana, the principle of Maharloka, is not the true supermind. Bhrigu Varuni, in the Taittiriya Upanishad, is supposed to have supramental realizations—*The Human Cycle* pp. 309-10.

liberation or illumination but a collective transformation of mankind. In other words, he claims to have worked for establishing the supramental consciousness on the earth-domain.[1] For the establishment of this divine power three things are necessary — the evolutionary necessity, the efforts of the individual and the consent of the divine.[2] No incarnation in the past worked for the supramental consummation. Rama wanted to establish a moralized civilization[3] and Krishna wanted to bring about the overmental consciousness on earth.[4] Aurobindo claims that he has worked for the descent of the supramental consciousness on earth and make it a permanent part of the earth-nature.[5]

6. CONCLUSION

The picture of the ideal supramental gnostic community and the techniques of integral Yoga that Sri Aurobindo has formulated are considered to be his greatest achievements. From the sociological and political standpoint the realization of this community will amount to what I would term a "Yogocracy" —the elite of the spiritually realized beings or the Yogis exercising the function of communal organization. The Yogocracy would politically be vastly different from normal social systems of coercion because in the spiritualized and

[1] *The Riddle of This World*, p. 2.

[2] Sri Aurobindo, *The Mother*, pp. 83-4.

[3] Sri Aurobindo, *Letters, Second Series*, pp. 508, 514.

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 493-4. Gautama Buddha made no attempt to complete positively the evolution on earth. Kalki is supposed to bring the divine kingdom upon earth by destroying the opposing Asura forces.

[5] *Savitri*, Book XI, Canto 1, pp. 332-3:

"A divine force shall flow through tissue and cell
And take the charge of breath and speech and act
And all the thoughts shall be a glow of suns
And every feeling a celestial thrill.
Often a lustrous inner dawn shall come
Lighting the chambers of the slumbering mind;
A sudden bliss shall run through every limb
And Nature with a mightier Presence fill.
Thus shall the earth open to divinity
And common natures feel the wide uplift,
Illumine common acts with the Spirit's ray
And meet the deity in common things.
Nature shall live to manifest secret God,
The Spirit shall take up the human play,
This earthly life become the life divine."

supramentalized society there would be reliance only on spiritual compulsion and spontaneous concord. The supramental beings probably would use some form of power if the unregenerate part of humanity adopted a hostile attitude towards them. Aurobindo does not specify whether they could use violence. Amongst themselves the conduct and behavior of gnostic beings would be based solely on spiritual mutuality and they would not engage in struggle and discord. The supramental beings would be more or less spiritual anarchists, because their ultimate obligation would be not to the state machine but to truth. The two pictures of ideal societies as provided by Aurobindo—the spiritualized society of *The Human Cycle*, and the gnostic community of supermen as formulated in *The Life Divine*, are from the standpoint of political philosophy exercises in utopian thinking. From the sociological point of view utopianism is an intellectual theory oriented to situational transcendence. Utter dissatisfaction with the contemporary and the historical structure generates the style of thought that finds satisfaction in imaginary plans, trans-terrestrial immutable virtues and ethereal political formulas. The decrepitude, pettiness, ugliness and savagery of the objectivized world is sought to be masked in a different and superior layer of reality and consciousness. There is a recoil from the actual world in the constructions of a romantic imagination. From Plato to H.G. Wells we have had several examples of this political utopianism. The picture of the *Ramarajya* and the *Dharmarajya*, as given in the Hindu epics, are also attempts in the same direction. It is true that several ideas and conceptions which appear chimerical today may become the concrete realities of the future, while some formulas and ideal types remain confined to celestial heights. Utopianism is generated as a reaction against the failure of historical humanity to concretize a certain set of normative plans in the dynamics of social and political reality.

Aurobindo's utopianism, however, is different from the Western prototypes in three respects. First, the Western Utopians were prescribing an idealistic pattern. They did not relate that to the evolutionary plan of nature. For Aurobindo, the ideals of the spiritualized society and the gnostic community

are not imaginative patterns but represent the inevitable stage to which social necessity and the evolutionary urge of nature are leading mankind. Aurobindo links his utopianism to an inevitable cosmic necessity. There is no such deterministic note in the Western theories. Secondly, the Western Utopians like Plato, More, Campanella and Harrington, are content with prescribing social, economic and at best psychological changes. Aurobindo is concerned not only with a reversion of the human consciousness but with a transmutation of the earth-nature. The supermind is not a psychological faculty but a cosmic and trans-cosmic power and its emergence would lead to a radical reversal of the mundane nature.[1] Aurobindo prescribes not a political, economic or sociological formula but a metapolitical, metaeconomic and metasociological plan. He is not satisfied with the historical, but hopes to achieve on earth the super-historical power and consciousness. Aurobindo's utopianism is conceived on an extended terrestrial and cosmic scale. Thirdly, the Western Utopians believe that the enlightenment of human reason can lead to the realization of the ideal society. Plato held that the only ways for the realization of the ideal state and society were either the providential compulsion of the small class of philosophers to condescend to rule, or the divine inspiration of rulers with the true love of philosophy. Philosophical reason or dialectical *noesis* is the cardinal concept in Plato's political philosophy. There are occasional references to divine intuition but the important position belongs to reason. Therefore Plato has stressed the rigorous study of the sciences for ten years prior to embarking upon the supreme philosophical journey. In Aurobindo the spiritual reality is the centre of attention. Man is to entertain genuine and sincere aspiration but the consummation of his efforts can only come through divine help. The grace and kindness of the world-mother, which is the executive force of the spiritual reality, is absolutely imperative; unaided human reason and feelings are powerless by themselves.[2]

The acceptance of absolute values for a transformed social

[1] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 932.
[2] Vladimir Solovĕv's triple utopia of theosophy, theocracy and theurgy has more in common with Aurobindo's utopianism than with the other Western utopians.

and political existence distinguishes the political approach of Aurobindo sharply from that of the modern sociological and political positivists who want a *Wertfrei* social science.[1] The latter conceive of political science as a non-teleological branch of knowledge, only analyzing political processes and dynamics and not concerned with prescribing any goals and objectives for society. If there are certain postulated goals, a social and political science can rationally calculate the costs for their concrete social realization, but it would not itself set the goals. In short, it would be a science not of ends but of means. Thus the modern quest of a value-free, ethically neutral, objective, political science is completely opposed to the conceptions of Plato and Aristotle, Cicero and Aquinas, who conceive of politics as a valuational science of moral virtue and social ends. Aurobindo's quest for ultimate values is in the classical and Christian tradition. There are vital differences, of course, of orientation and emphasis in Aurobindo, the Greek thinkers and the Christian scholastics but there is a fundamental methodological similarity because all are agreed that a political philosophy should prescribe for mankind the best way of political and social living.

The gnostic community will attempt to reconcile freedom and order, individualism and collectivism—antinomies which modern socialism and democracy have failed to reconcile. The central cause responsible for our malady, according to Aurobindo, is the ego. "Ego is the obstacle, the lynch-pin of the wheel of delusion, the loss of the ego in the soul's self the first condition of freedom." In his ideal society he wants the elimination of individual ego, the communal ego and the national ego. Only the manifestation of the spiritual force in all its effulgence and many-sided complexity can eliminate the ego and lead to the growth of a truly spiritual individuality which is the concrete union of particularity, universality and the transcendental consciousness. The political, moral, religious and economic phases and aspects of individualism, as developed by Epicurus, the Bible, the Anabaptists, the classical economists

[1] For a discussion of this problem see, Max Weber, *The Methodology of Social Science*; E. Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*; T. Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action*; Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*.

and Spencer, had great political repercussions in Western history. The student of politics cannot help asking whether Aurobindo's theory of supramental individualism will have some important social and political consequences. Will such a gnostic individual be available for working in a transformed democracy? Will he contest for any office in the unregenerate part of humanity? Perhaps it may be assumed that the gnostic being would like to lead a detached life and would not care for becoming involved in social and political struggles. Some of the gnostic beings may even develop an attitude of spiritual sophistication towards the unregenerate multitude, and instead of being active leaders imbued with the higher spiritual energy, would perhaps be content to give spiritual advice about Yoga. It was a persistent principle of ancient Hindu political tradition that the spiritual and moral saints and teachers should offer advice to the political rulers. One of the curses of political life today is that instead of elevating the multitude the leader has to descend to their level and pander to their passions. If Aurobindo's vision could be concretely actualized, if the gnostic consciousness could really be realized on earth and the gnostic beings take genuine compassionate interest in the political problems of mankind, the political scene could perhaps be transformed. Even if the spiritualization and supramentalization of man and society may not be realizable on any large scale in the immediate future, the vision of Aurobindo about the transformation of man is a magnificent creation of the intellect, and is an eloquent testimony to the persistent aspiration of the human being to transcend his perversities and limitations and dream of the eventual dawn of the divine kingdom on the terrestrial plane. Aurobindo's immense faith and genuine conviction regarding the inevitable supramental transformation of the present-day consciousness make *The Life Divine* and the *Savitri* grandiloquent epics of the spiritual epiphany of man.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Aurobindo's thought-structure is certainly one of the most massive and cyclopean products of the contemporary renaissance movement in India. Aurobindo occupies a leading position not only among the makers of our political destiny, but also among the most pronounced spokesmen of the idealistic aspirations of India. He is a very significant interpreter of Indian philosophic idealism and historic culture. As a great synthesizer of the Eastern and Western moral, spiritual and aesthetic traditions Aurobindo will rank among the towering personalities of the age. Tagore is reported to have said to him: "You have the Word and we are waiting to accept it from you. India will speak through your voice to the world."[1] On the basis of his own integral spiritual realizations, he has presented in *Savitri* and *The Life Divine* not only the gospel of dynamic spiritual transformation in the world, but has written luminous commentaries on some of the Vedic hymns, the Isha and the Kena Upanishads and the Gita. In these interpretations, besides analyzing the esoteric and mystic thought of these books he has tried to stress their vitalistic and world-fulfilling message, and therefore even his religious and metaphysical books have a great sociological significance.

Throughout, Aurobindo's system is characterized by sublimity and inspiring power. Aurobindo inspires his readers by the vehemence and zeal and depth behind his words, by his burning enthusiasm for the resurrection of the country and also by his remarkable command of English prose. His writings have played a great role in moulding the political future of Bengal, and to some extent also of India, and he will be ranked as a great political prophet with a meaningful message for his people. Subhas Chandra Bose was greatly inspired by the life and writings of Aurobindo.

Aurobindo's political philosophy represents an attempt to build up a gigantic intellectual structure. It shows the

[1] Quoted in K.R.S. Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo* (Calcutta, Arya Publishing House, 1950), pp. 7-8.

influence of the *Bhagavadgita*. There are several points of similarity between Aurobindo's system and the works of other thinkers and scholars such as Heraclitus, Plato, Dante, Kant, Hegel, Mazzini, Nietzsche, Karl Lamprecht, Bergson, Dayananda, Vivekananda, Tilak and others. The dominant Vedantism of all the great political thinkers in modern India—Vivekananda, Tilak, Aurobindo, Tagore and Gandhi—imparts a deep spiritual orientation to the political views of these writers. Their basic conclusions are remarkably similar. All of them stress spiritual freedom, nationalism synthesized with international orientations, anti-utilitarianism and an incorporation of moral-spiritual values in the social and political structure.

The empirical political scientist of the West will miss in Aurobindo Aristotle's systematic treatment of the various forms of government and the causes of revolutions. He will not find here a quest for the methodological foundations of politics as in Hobbes. He will not discover any original theory of jurisprudence comparable to the systems of Bentham, Austin, Thibaut or Jellinek. He may not get a close analytical reasoning like that of Green into the bases of political obligation. The greatness of Aurobindo's political philosophy lies in a different direction. He was an important leader of the Extremist school of politics, and, like Mazzini, the prophet of an inspired nationalism. He had supreme faith in the spiritual transformation of human history and action. The true significance of Aurobindo's political philosophy can be visualized if we compare him with Plato and Dante. Like Plato, Aurobindo was a great metaphysician and like him he has pleaded for the regeneration of the social and political existence of man. Dante has embodied his ethereal mystic glimpse of the ineffable supreme spirit in *The Divine Comedy*. He has provided us with the theory of a united Christian commonwealth in *De Monarchia*. In the nobility and sublimity of vision *The Ideal of Human Unity* of Aurobindo bears remarkable affinity with *De Monarchia* of Dante and *The Perpetual Peace* of Immanuel Kant.

We can distinguish two levels in the political philosophy of Aurobindo. In his earlier days and in his primarily sociological works he advocates nationalism, democracy based on liberty, the economic ideal of socialism and human unity. But as a

Yogi and a spiritualist his final message is a spiritualized synthesis of individualism and collectivism and the formation of the gnostic individual and society. Because of the significance and immense value of the individual it is possible to advocate the integral freedom of man which can be progressively realized through the actualization of a spiritualized society and the descent of the supramental consciousness.

In the context of modern Indian political thought and practice the great contribution of Aurobindo has been the theory of an exalted, purified and sanctified nationalism. He had the vision and the boldness to preach absolute democratic Swaraj for India in 1907. But he never interpreted nationalism as a narrow creed or chauvinistic cult. He wanted the great values of Indian ethics and culture—*Tapasya*, *Jnanam* and *Sakti*, to become the dynamic galvanizers of a rejuvenated nation, and both the leaders and the followers to follow pure means. Nationalism is not the last category of Aurobindo's political philosophy. He has been one of the earliest prophets of human unity. He has a vision not of the mechanical political unity of man, but dreams of an inner oneness of all human beings. All types of separations and dividing walls are to crumble and man is to be united in an inward fraternity. Cooperation, mutuality, reciprocity, forbearance and love are to be the key factors moulding the lives of men.

In the present era, when under the guise of *Realpolitik* there has been the revival of Spartan totalitarianism, Prussianism, oligarchical plutocracy and *Machtpolitik*, the political writings of Aurobindo have a great importance for mankind because of their supreme emphasis on peace, virtue, harmony, freedom and co-operative mutuality. He has made the modern generation of intellectuals aware of the spiritual imperative even for genuine and stable success in social and political action. Thus far, we have had intellectual and moral approaches to politics. Aurobindo thinks that even the ethical approach has to be transcended and there has to be a concrete experience of spiritual consciousness for solving the problems of mankind. Even if we may find it impossible to accept the mystical metaphysics of Aurobindo, with too much reference to the subliminal, the inconscient and the transcendent, his emphasis

on the importance of the individual appears to me to be a great service to political science. In these days of totalitarianism and collectivization Aurobindo's emphasis on the sanctity, the dignity and worth of the individual is a great contribution. This emphasis on individual worth can serve as the spiritual foundation of democracy and can strengthen the concept of racial and social equality. Aurobindo thinks that the ideal law of social development must harmonize the claims both of the individual and the collectivity. He recommends the socialist economic ideal, the concept of human unity and the spiritual freedom of the human individual. The simultaneous advocacy of spiritual individualism, economic socialism and internationalism is a unique note in Aurobindo's political philosophy.

The fundamental weakness of Aurobindo's political philosophy is a lack of adequate empirical substantiations. Whenever he criticized a political scheme or generalization he did so not at the empirical level but merely said that it would not work without an essential spiritual change of man's nature. His writings can provide inspiration to those who believe in idealistic metaphysics and spiritual psychology but perhaps they cannot be used as tools for future research work and investigation in the social sciences.

At times it may appear that the metaphysical foundations for a realistic and empirical social and political philosophy are lacking in Aurobindo. The conception that the world with all its irrationalities, contradictions, misery and tragedy is only the play (Lila) of the divine, and the idea that the world has evolved because of the voluntary plunge of the divine into nescience in order to enjoy the pleasures of adventures in division and discord, appear unacceptable to the modern scientific mind. Such an ethereal metaphysical foundation can justify at best a cold Spencerianism, not socialism and internationalism. It is difficult to take literally such statements as "our being has to break the walls of ego-consciousness which it has created, it has to extend itself beyond the body and inhabit the body of the universe",[2] from a sociologically realistic standpoint. To criticize the imperfect attempts at achieving something good for mankind through institutional and political devices by

[2] *The Life Divine*, vol. II, p. 288.

such obscure mystical utterances does not seem to be of concrete social relevance. It is true that the modern political-institutional attempts at human unity refer to 'constructed and mechanical unity' but the alternative conception that "this Purusha, this cause and self of individuality, comes to embrace the whole world and all other beings in a sort of conscious extension of itself and to perceive itself as one with the world-being",[3] looks like a mystical utopianism which may not be realized on the concrete mundane plane, at least not in the foreseeable future.

Towards the end of his life Aurobindo only occasionally made political statements and the retired, contemplative life he led in his Ashrama might imply that perhaps he was not contemplating the synthesis of political power and spiritual insight—the famous dream of Plato—but was concerned with Yoga, self-surrender to God and political non-participation.

From the experiences of Russian Communism, German Fascism and other irrational political and social philosophies in the West, one feels that there may be some danger of the exploitation of Aurobindo's conception of India's mission in the world, his condemnation of the inadequacy of analytical discursive reason and his exaltation of the superman. It is possible that a totalitarian political party may dissociate the spiritual foundations of his political ideas and exploit them for its selfish ends. Such a fear is not unfounded except on the ground that the difficult character of Aurobindo's books makes them inaccessible to most political party workers.

Sometimes it has been said that Aurobindo's writings are not marked by logical precision. There is supposed to be an endless and exhaustive play with the words 'divine' and 'spirit'. It has also been stated that we find repetitions in his writings. It is true that in Aurobindo we do not find the analytical and verbal subtlety of a trained and perfect mathematical logician or a scholastic *Naiyayika*. But it should be remembered that Aurobindo was not a semanticist and a logician. He was a great prophet and a sage. He was a poet gifted with great powers of literary and philosophical creativity. He has written the *Savitri*—perhaps one of the greatest epics of the world. The

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 90.

style of writing of a sage, prophet and poet is bound to be different from that of a lawyer and a logician. Aurobindo's fondness for poetic appeal is found in almost all his prose writings too. He was the messiah of a new transformed humanity and he wanted his spiritual message to be stressed even at the cost of some repetition. A logician may complain about the occasional verbosity of Aurobindo's writings, but perhaps that was natural with a prophet who wanted to communicate his gospel in an inspired and rhetorical language which has great literary charm and power.

In spite of certain shortcomings from the standpoint of the modern empirical social and political sciences, Aurobindo's work is monumental in the sense that he has ventured into an untrodden field. He does not merely repeat what is said in the ancient religious scriptures, nor does he reiterate the formulas of Burke, Spencer, Mill, Hegel and Green. His merit lies in building a political and social philosophy on the basis of Eastern and Western political idealism. The very fact that he has felt the need of a spiritual political philosophy and has written two books—*The Ideal of Human Unity* and *The Human Cycle*—in that field is a great achievement. For years to come he will be revered as a great political leader, Yogi, poet, philosopher and social thinker.

The supreme concept in Aurobindo's thought is the divinization of man. The perverted, alienated and contaminated consciousness of man is responsible for corruption, agony, barbarity and pugnacity. The life of man is to be lit with a new vision. The divine values of unity and freedom should be dynamically incorporated into human consciousness. Man has given up his spiritual heritage and status and is content with being dehumanized. Aurobindo pleads for a divinzation of man and society. He wants a spiritualization of politics. Plato and Hegel also were leaders in the idealistic philosophy of thought but Aurobindo is more liberal, broad-minded and universalistic in his ideas. He is a philosopher not of the good of the city or the nation, not even only of mankind but of the totality of living creatures. The concept of the good of all, *Sarvabhutahita*, is the prime gospel of Hindu moral philosophy. Gautama Buddha was one of its earliest and staunchest protagonists. It is Aurobindo's

merit that he has taken up the ancient aspirations of man for a kingdom of God on earth and for the reign of peace, unity and freedom, very seriously. At a time when modern political science is busy only with analyzing the processes, dynamics and uniformities of political power and phenomena, at a time when under the guise of a 'value-free' objective discipline it has renounced its connexion with ethical norms and ideals and is trying to become geometrical, non-teleological, logico-experimental and positivistic, Aurobindo's contribution is the prolonged and systematic emphasis on a universalistically-oriented political philosophy committed to the pursuit of the unity, freedom, peace and good of all humanity. Aurobindo has given a new lease of life to idealism in politics. Idealism in politics had become anathema because of the Hegelian-Bosanquetian glorification of nationalism and the state as an end. The quest after the conceptual elaboration of 'the idea of state' had drawn the criticism of humanists, liberals, democrats and socialists. Aurobindo has rid idealism of its unholy alliance with narrow parochialism and the advocacy of the interests of the powers that be. There are certain totalitarian elements in Plato and certain absolutistic elements in Hegel. Aurobindo has provided a pure system of idealistic political philosophy. He has given a vital message to man. At a time when modern political science is going through a crisis, Aurobindo's meaningful idealism, which aims to synthesize individualism, collectivism and even anarchism, is a powerful gospel. He has tried to meet the challenge of the modern world in the form of materialism, naturalism, critical rationalism, biological vitalism, and atheism. His spiritual idealism is a monumental attempt at the synthesis of human thought. Aurobindo was one of the titanic minds of the modern world. He was the integral man or the complete man. He had the unique gift of being at home in the best of the Eastern and Western systems of thought. He had a subtle, keen and sympathetic mind. He was constructive in his philosophic approach. He was in the best position to build a synthetic philosophy because he thoroughly knew both the East and the West. His gigantic system is a great landmark in the broad movement of the idealism which began with Yajnavalkya, Uddalaka, Parmenides and Plato and was

developed by Samkara, Ramanuja, Kant, Hegel and Schopenhauer. It is an invaluable addition to existing literature on social, political and moral philosophy. It has the capacity to open a valuational, all-encompassing spiritual dimension to mankind. Aurobindo will be hailed not only as a mighty prophet of humanity, not only as one of the leaders of Indian renaissance and liberation, not only as a Yogi, poet, metaphysician and critic, but also as a leader in idealistic political theory.

APPENDIX ONE

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF LOKAMANYATILAK AND MAHARSHI AUROBINDO

Lokamanya was a political Extremist but there were some differences between his political thought and the political conceptions of the Bengal school of Extremist nationalists. During the days of the anti-partition agitation Pal, Aurobindo, Shyam Sundar Chakravarti, Ashwini Kumar Datta and other leaders of Bengal worked under the guidance of Tilak. Tilak was decidedly the acknowledged leader of the New Party. But in the plane of thought there were subtle differences between the ideas of Tilak and Aurobindo. In Aurobindo we find the concept of Kali as the *Zeit-Geist* (spirit of the time). He refers to God as the captain of the nationalist movement. He confesses having visions of Krishna in the Alipore Jail. The writings of Pal and Aurobindo are characterized by an exalted, inspired and fervid emotionalism. In Aurobindo there is a passion for metaphysical abstractions and theological symbols. After his return from the Alipore Jail Aurobindo said that Sanatan Dharma itself was nationalism. Tilak on the other hand had a strong sense of the real and the concrete. There is a constant appeal in his writings and speeches for making immediate changes in the administrative mechanism of the country, and there is far less emphasis on the vision of the spiritualized society and the gnostic community. If Aurobindo was inspired by the teachings of Bankima Chandra regarding the country as the Mother, Tilak was influenced by the character and personality of Shivaji and Nana Fadnavis. In the character of Bengal there is an excessive degree of emotionalism and imagination. In Maharashtra we find the predominance of common sense and sober realism.[1] This difference in the characteristics of the two provinces is revealed in the different theoretical approaches of Sri Aurobindo and Lokamanya.

Tilak emphasized the psychological conception of nationalism

[1] Cf. Zacharias, *Renascent India*, p. 151.

and said that a feeling of belonging together was essential for constituting an agglomeration of people into a nation.[1] But Aurobindo and Pal stressed the spiritual-religious conception of nation. Aurobindo considered nationalism as a pure and *Sattvika* religion. Tilak said that Swarajya was essential for freeing India from the evils of an alien bureaucratic pattern. But Aurobindo said that the political salvation of India was essential for the spiritual redemption of mankind. The notion of messianism, the conception that India was rising for spreading the glories of Sanatan Dharma in the world is very strong in Aurobindo.

Lokamanya had a passionate love for India's independence, but as a programme for political achievement he always sponsored the concept of Swarajya under British sovereignty. Tilak fought for *Swarajya* (home rule) while the political Extremists of Bengal clamoured for *Swatantrata* (independence).[2] Lokamanya was a great politician, and as an objective he always put forward only the concept of Swarajya or home rule or self-government.[3] Pal and Aurobindo during the Swadeshi days talked of independence. (Later on Pal became an advocate of imperial federation.) Aurobindo challenged the right of a foreign imperialism to force "an inferior civilization" on India. Tilak spoke cautiously and said after the Calcutta Congress: "As an ideal, independence is all right but you cannot work for it without bringing yourself within the clutches of law. Working for it will be waging war against the King."[4] But although in his speeches and writings Tilak always avoided the word independence and always contented himself with the word self-government, yet the British Government realized that he was their greatest political enemy. The British Government knew that there was one individual in India whom no seductions and no favours could ever dissuade from his self-chosen path. The indomitable Tilak was the most relentless opponent of the British Empire in India till the moment of his death.

[1] N.C. Kelkar, *Life and Times of Tilak*, pp. 486-7.

[2] *Tilak's Writings in the Kesari*, 3 Volumes (in Marathi), vol. III, pp. 248-9.

[3] In a speech at the seventeenth anniversary of Tilak's death, reported in the *Mahratta*, August 6, 1937, V.D. Savarkar stated that Tilak taught the principle of complete independence.

[4] *Reminiscenes of Lokamanya Tilak*, vol. I, p. 483.

Both the Bengal Extremists and Lokamanya accepted the conception of passive resistance. According to Tilak, Swadeshi and boycott were the techniques of passive resistance.[1] But according to Aurobindo passive resistance had a more comprehensive meaning. Passive resistance to Aurobindo meant resistance against, or transgression of, an unjust law or an unjust decree in a peaceful way. Aurobindo was satisfied not only with preaching Swadeshi and the morality of boycott, but he also preached resistance to unjust laws and unjust decrees.[2]

(Excerpts from Dr. V.P. Varma's unpublished book, *Lokamanya Tilak*, 2 Volumes.)

[1] Tilak's Speech at Belgaum in September 1906.
[2] Sri Aurobindo, *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance.*

APPENDIX TWO

SRI C. R. DAS'S EXPOSITION OF SRI AUROBINDO'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

"So far as the nation was concerned, he (Aurobindo) preached that lofty ideal of freedom. So far as the individual was concerned, his idea always was to go there himself and look for the Godhead within. It is a familiar ideal of our country. It is difficult for those not familiar with it to understand it.

"The doctrine of Vedantism is that man is not dissociated from God: that is to say, if you want to realize your self you must look for the God within you. It is within your heart and within your soul that you will find that God dwells, and as no man can attain to his own salvation without reaching to that God that is within you, so also in the case of nations . . . no nation can attain this unless it realizes the highest and noblest and the best of that nation. As in the case of individuals you cannot reach your God with extraneous aid, but you must make an effort—that supreme effort—yourself before you can realize the God within you; so also with a nation. It is by itself that a nation must grow; a nation must attain its salvation by its unaided effort. No foreigner can give you that salvation. It is within your own hands to revive that spirit of nationality. That is the doctrine of nationality which Aurobindo has preached throughout and that was to be done, not by methods which are against the traditions of the country. I ask your particular attention to that. It was not Aurobindo's philosophy that salvation was to be attained by methods inconsistent with the whole history and traditions of the writer, and therefore, when you find Aurobindo leaving Baroda and coming to Calcutta you find that the doctrines he preaches are not doctrines of violence but doctrines of passive resistance. It is not bombs, but suffering. He deprecates secret societies and violence and enjoins them to suffer. If there is a law which is unjust and offensive against the development of the nation, break that law by all means and take the consequences. He never asked you to apply force in a single utterance of his either in the Press or

on the platform. If the Government thought fit to bring in a law which hinders you from attaining that salvation, Aurobindo's advice is to break that law, if necessary, in the sense of not obeying it. You owe it to your conscience; you owe it to your God. If the law says you must go to jail, go to jail. That was the cardinal feature of the doctrine of passive resistance which Aurobindo preached. Is not the doctrine of passive resistance preached throughout the world on the same footing? Is it peculiar to this country—this movement which has met with such abusive language from Mr. Norton? Have not the people of England done it over and over again? I say that this is the same doctrine that Aurobindo was preaching almost up to the very day when those handcuffs were put on his hands. He was oppressed with a feeling of disappointment, because his country was losing everything, having lost their faith. Therefore, you find, whenever he preached freedom, he brought out that feature clearly. He says, believe in yourself; no one attains salvation who does not believe in himself. Similarly, he says, in the case of the nation. If the nation does not feel that it has got something within it to be free to attain that salvation then there is no hope for that nation. Accordingly we find Aurobindo preaching 'you are not cowards, you are not a set of incapable men, because you have got divinity. Have faith in you and in that faith go towards that goal and become a self-developed nation'.

"It is impossible that Aurobindo could ever believe in his heart of hearts that, by bombing one or two Englishmen or some Englishmen at different places, they could ever have been able to subvert the British Government. If you credit him with intellectual powers and say that he has a brilliant mind, is it open to you at the same time to say that he was the leader of a childish conspiracy and a toy revolution....

"If the Government has taken into its head to believe that there is a vast conspiracy which is threatening the stability of the Government, it is common knowledge that you do come across spies who give false evidence. I shall just read a passage from a book written by an eminent judge: 'The Government under these circumstances have spies who wriggle into the case, eavesdrop into families, abstract correspondence and false

letters'. Therefore the evidence given before you is evidence that you can expect in a case like this . . . .

"My appeal to you, therefore, is that a man like this, who is being charged with the offence with which he has been charged, stands not only before the bar in this Court, but stands before the bar of the High Court of History. My appeal to you is this, that long after the controversy will be hushed in silence, long after this turmoil, the agitation will have ceased, long after he is dead and gone, he will be looked upon as the poet of patriotism, as the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity. Long after he is dead and gone, his words will be echoed and re-echoed not only in India, but across distant seas and lands. Therefore, I say, that the man in his position is not only standing before the bar of this court, but before the bar of the High Court of History."

[Extracts from Sri Chittranjan Das's speech at the trial of Sri Aurobindo in the famous Alipore Bomb Conspiracy Case, 1908]

APPENDIX THREE

SRI BIPIN CHANDRA PAL ON SRI AUROBINDO'S POLITICAL THOUGHT

"The youngest in age among those who stand in the forefront of the Nationalist propaganda in India, but in endowment, education, and character, perhaps superior to them all—Aravinda seems distinctly marked out by Providence to play in the future of this movement a part not given to any of his colleagues and contemporaries. The other leaders of the movement have left their life behind them: Aravinda has his before him. Nationalism is their last love: it is Aravinda's first passion. They are burdened with the cares and responsibilities of large families or complex relations: Aravinda has a small family and practically no cumulative obligations. His only care is for his country—the Mother, as he always calls her. His only recognised obligations are to her. Nationalism, at the best a concern of the intellect with some, at the lowest a political cry and aspiration with others, is with Aravinda, the supreme passion of his soul. Few, indeed, have grasped the full force and meaning of the Nationalist ideal as Aravinda has done . . . .

"Aravinda has received the best modern education that any man of this country and generation could expect to have. He had for some years been a teacher of youth in Baroda, and had acquired a considerable practical experience in his art. He had clearly realised the spirit and actualities of the life of his nation, and knew how the most advanced principles of modern pedagogy could be successfully worked into a thoroughly national system of education in India. He went to Calcutta as an educationist. He knew that the foundations of national independence and national greatness must be laid in a strong and advanced system of national education. He had a political ideal, no doubt; but politics meant to him much more than is ordinarily understood by the term. It was not a game of expediency but school of human character, and, in its turn, reacting upon it, should develop and strengthen the manhood and womanhood of the nation. Education could be no more divorced from politics than it could be divorced from religion

or morals. Any system of education that helps such isolation and division between the various organic relations of life, is medieval, and not modern. It is the education of the cloister—abstract and unreal; not the education of the modern man, eager to realise his fullest manhood in and through every relation of life. Aravinda is an apostle of modern education. Indeed his ideal of modern education is even higher than what is understood by modern education ordinarily in Europe. It is a supremely spiritual ideal. Its aim is to actualise the highest and deepest of God-consciousness of the human soul, in the outer life and appointments of human society. . . .

The Nationalist School was without a daily English organ. A new paper was started. Aravinda was invited to join its staff. A joint stock company was shortly floated to run it, and Aravinda became one of the directors. This paper—"Bande Mataram"—at once secured for itself a recognised position in Indian journalism. The hand of the master was in it from the very beginning. Its bold attitude, its vigorous thinking, its clear ideas, its chaste and powerful diction, its scorching sarcasm and refined witticism were unsurpassed by any journal in the country, either Indian or Anglo-Indian. It at once raised the tone of every Bengalee paper, and compelled the admiration of even hostile Anglo-Indian editors. Morning after morning not only Calcutta, but the educated community almost in every part of the country eagerly awaited its vigorous pronouncements on the stirring questions of the day. It even forced itself upon the notice of the callous and self-centred British press. Long extracts from it commenced to be reproduced week after week, even in the exclusive columns of the "Times" in London. It was a force in the country which none dared to ignore, however much they might fear or hate it, and Aravinda was the leading spirit, the central figure, in the new journal."

(Excerpts from Sri Bipin Chandra Pal's famous article on Sri Aurobindo's life and work written in 1909-1910 and published in B.C. Pal's book *Indian Nationalism: Its Personalities and Principles*.)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

(Almost all the books by Sri Aurobindo have been published either by the Arya Publishing House, Calcutta or by the Sri Aurobindo Ashrama Press, Pondichery. There is an American edition published from Sri Aurobindo Library, New York, of *The Life Divine, Essays on the Gita, The Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity* and *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Part One. The American edition is very valuable for its index. The particular editions used in the book have been indicated in footnotes.)

WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO

Social and Political Philosophy
The Ideal of Human Unity
The Human Cycle
After the War
Foundations of Indian Culture
The Spirit and Form of Indian Polity
Speeches
The Doctrine of Passive Resistance
Bankim-Tilak-Dayananda
The Renaissance in India
Bankim Chandra Chatterjee
The Ideal of the Karmayogin
Ideals and Progress
A System of National Education
The National Value of Art
The Significance of Indian Art
The Brain of India
Uttarapara Speech
Messages of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, (First Series)
Messages of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, (Second Series)
War and Self-Determination
Dharma Aur Jatiyata, (In Hindi)
The Superman
Evolution
The Teaching and the Asrama of Sri Aurobindo
Science and Culture
Integral Education
Kya Bharat Sabhya Hai, (In Hindi)

Hamari Swatantrata Kaisi Ho, (In Hindi)
Sri Aurobindo's Lectures in Western India, (In Marathi)

ANCIENT INDIAN LITERATURE, PHILOSOPHY AND YOGA

On the Veda
Hymns to the Mystic Fire
Veda-Rahasya, (2 Volumes In Hindi)
Isha Upanishad
Kena Upanishad
Eight Upanishads, Isha, Kena, Katha, Mundaka, Prasna, Mandukya, Taittiriya and Aitareya, (Translated into English)
Essays on the Gita, (First Series)
Essays on the Gita, (Second Series)
Kalidasa
Kalidasa, (Second Series)
The Life Divine, (2 Volumes)
Heraclitus
The Problems of Rebirth
The Riddle of This World
The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth
Thoughts and Glimpses
The Mother
On Yoga
The Synthesis of Yoga, (Part I)
Bases of Yoga
Lights on Yoga
More Lights on Yoga
Elements of Yoga
The Yoga and its Objects
Letters of Sri Aurobindo, (First Series)
Letters of Sri Aurobindo, (Second Series)
Letters of Sri Aurobindo, (Fourth Series)
Gita Ki Bhumika, (In Hindi)

LITERARY WORKS

Savitri, (In 3 Parts)
Collected Poems and Plays, (2 Volumes)

Letters of Sri Aurobindo on Savitri
Letters of Sri Aurobind, (Third Series)
The Future Poetry
The Birth of the War-God
Last Poems
Chitrangada
Poems: Past and Present
Conversations of the Dead
The Phantom Hour
Views and Reviews
Vyasa and Valmiki
Songs of Vidyapati
Poems from Bengali
Vasavadatta
Ilion
More Poems

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL

Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother
Kara Kahini, (In Bengali)

WEEKLIES AND JOURNALS EDITED BY SRI AUROBINDO

Bande Mataram, (1907-1908)
The Karmayogin, (1909-1910)
Dharma, (In Bengali)
The Arya, (1914-1921)

BIOGRAPHICAL, INTERPRETATIVE AND CRITICAL WORKS

Banerjee, S. — *A Short Treatise on The Life Divine*
Chatterjee, B. C. — *Gandhi or Aurobindo*
Chandrasekharan, V. — *Sri Aurobindo's 'The Life Divine'*
Chaudhury, H. — *Sri Aurobindo : The Prophet of Life Divine*
The Philosophy of Integralism
(Calcutta University D. Phil. Thesis.)

Das, A. C.	*Sri Aurobindo and the Future of Mankind* (1935)
Diwakar, R. R.	*Mahayogi*
Donnelly Morwenna	*Founding The Life Divine*, (London, Rider & C., 1955)
Gupta, N. K.	*Towards a New Society*
	The Malady of the Century
	The Coming Race
	The Yoga of Sri Aurobindo, (Eight Parts)
	Poets and Mystics
	The March of Civilization
	The Quest and the Goal
	The Approach to Mysticism
Iyengar, K. R. S.	*Sri Aurobindo*
Langley, G. H.	*Sri Aurobindo: Poet, Philosopher and Mystic*
Mitra, S. K.	*Sri Aurobindo and Indian Freedom*
	The Liberator
Maitra, S. K.	*An Introduction to the Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo*
	Studies in Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy
	The Meeting of the East and the West in Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy
Mother, The	*On Education*
	Prayers and Mediations of the Mother
Nevinson, H. W.	*The New Spirit in India*
Palit, R.	*Life of Aravindo Ghosh*
Purani, A. B.	*Sri Aurovindo's Savitri: An Approach and a Study*
	Sri Aurobindo: Addresses on his Life and Teachings
	Sri Aurobindo in England
Radhakrishnan, S. & Moore, C. A.	*Source-Book of Indian Philosophy*
Roy, Anilbaran	*Sri Aurobindo and the New Age*
	The Message of the Gita
Roy, D. K.	*Among the Great*
	Sri Aurobindo Came to Me
Sarkar, M. N.	*Eastern Lights*

Sarma, D. S. *The Renascence of Hinduism*

Sastry, T. V. K. *Lights on the Veda*
Lights on the Upanishads
Lights on the Fundamentals

Sethna, K. D. *The Poetic Genius of Sri Aurobindo*
The Indian Spirit and the World's Future
The Passing of Sri Aurobindo

Srivastava, R. S. *Sri Aurobindo and Theories of Evolution* (Unpublished D. Litt. Thesis of the Patna University)

Varma, V. P. "Sri Aurobindo's Interpretations of Buddhist Philosophy" (In the *Journal of Bihar Research Society*, Buddha Jayanti Special Issue, 1956). "East and West in Aurobindo's Political Philosophy" (*Philosophy East and West*, October, 1955)

Selections from the Bande Mataram, (Banaras, 1922)
Yogi Ardvinda Ki Divya Kani, (In Hindi)
Aravinda Mandir Men, (In Hindi)

MAGAZINES AND JOURNALS RELATING TO SRI AUROBINDO'S PHILOSOPHY

Sri Aurobindo Mandira Annual, (Fifteen Issues)
Sri Aurobindo Circle Annual, (Twelve Issues)
The Advent
Mother India
Bulletin of Physical Education
Aditi, (In Hindi)

INDEX

Dr. Vishwanath Prasad Varma was born in 1924. After a brilliant academic career and having received some of the highest academic degrees in India he went to the United States where he took his Doctorate at the Chicago University. While there, he participated in the Second Pan-American Congress of Philosophy held in New York in January 1949.

In India he has distinguished himself as a scholar and has delivered a series of Extension Lectures on Modern Indian Thought at the S.C.S. College, Puri, and read out a number of papers at various Conferences of the All India Political Science Association.

Quite early in his academic life Dr. Varma came under the spell of Sri Aurobindo's teachings and writings. In 1945 he made a pilgrimage to Pondicherry to pay his homage to Sri Aurobindo. The present book is the result of nearly sixteen years of deep study and all the pains he has taken over the work is a labour of love for him. This work is the first attempt made by any student of Aurobindo to formulate from his numerous writings a coherent and systematic philosophy of politics.

Besides this book Dr. Varma is the author of several others both in English and Hindi. At present he is the Assistant Professor at the Post-Graduate Department of Political Science, Patna University.